

## ACROSS THE FENCE

With Joanne Stevenson



# Whose conflict and whose interest?

When it comes to conflict of interest charges, you tend to think of Bill and Hillary Clinton and the Whitewater scandal; Brian Mulroney and the Aerobus allegations. Situations where an elected official gains inside information and has the opportunity to profit from that information.

You certainly don't think of Ethel Gardiner, formerly a special education teacher and now trustee at the Halton Board of Ed. for Wards 1 and 2, Halton Hills.

A conflict of interest complaint was filed in June against five Halton trustees by the Taxpayers Coalition Burlington Inc. Named in the suit were Oakville's Penny Siebert, Burlington trustees Linda Glover and Joe Pavelka, Milton's Flo Belford and our very own Ethel Gardiner. The Coalition believes that these trustees, "because of relationships they have with board employees or employees of other boards – should have declared a conflict of interest and refrained from voting or influencing the vote on the budget."

The budget is presented to trustees as a package. Debate, and later voting, is carried out on a line-by-line basis. Ethel, whose daughter is employed at the Board, declared a conflict of interest on the lines dealing with staff compensation, but voted on the entire budget package. Each of these trustees, and several others not named in the suit, did the same. The Coalition believes these trustees should not have voted at all.

As Ethel states, "Throughout Ontario, and indeed since the inception of the Halton Board, trustees have declared conflicts on specific budget items, yet have voted on the entire budget. I see that [voting on the bottom line] as my responsibility as trustee."

I'd have to agree. We already had six months without a voice at the Board table – the time between trustee Dave Whiting's resignation and Ethel's election to office. If our trustee can't speak for her constituents and can't vote on the budget, why have a trustee?

Ethel made no secret that her daughter was a teacher, and that she herself had recently retired. For many it was Ethel's understanding of the system that convinced them to vote for her. The worst thing about these allegations for Ethel is that they imply dishonesty and attack her integrity. But the bottom line for Ethel has *always* been the kids.

The Taxpayers Coalition has a mandate to force governments to bring in budgets with zero tax increase. Commendable! Applaudable! I don't want to pay more taxes either. Neither does Ethel. She made suggestions for cuts to the budget that would have saved millions of dollars, but those suggestions were voted down.

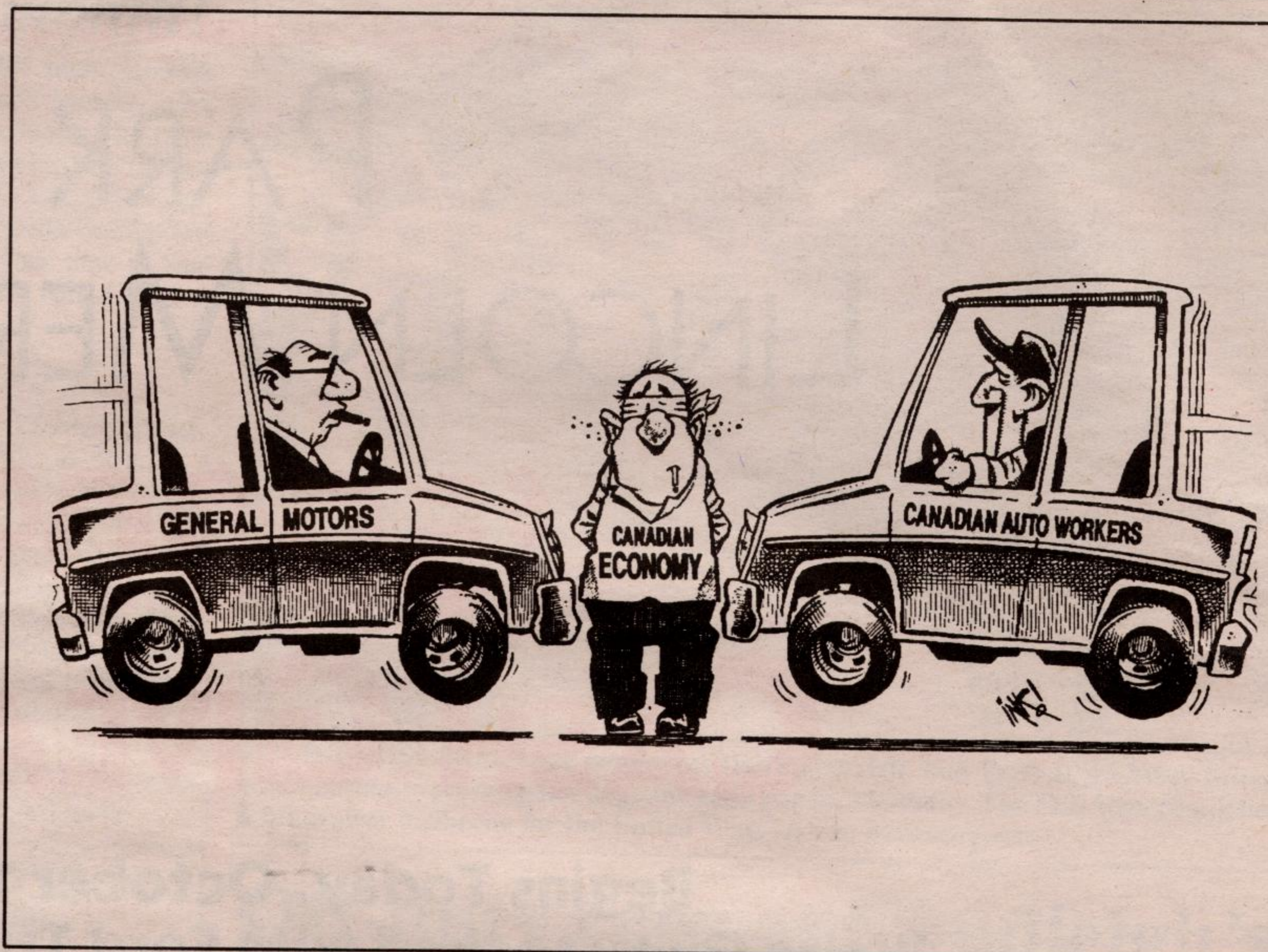
The final budget allowed for a small increase in the mill rate and it passed by a very narrow margin, 10 to 8. The five trustees named in the suit voted in favour of the budget, a coincidence in the politically-driven Board worth note.

Since the September court date was bumped back to November, the Coalition will have several more weeks to continue their door-to-door campaign to solicit funds to cover their court costs. The trustees must pay their own legal bills.

It's interesting to note that the Coalition, who presumes to be the watchdogs of taxpayers' money, is asking taxpayers to spend upwards of a quarter of a million dollars to conduct five by-elections if these five lose their court case.

If members of the Coalition are not happy with the way our elected representative votes on issues, they are welcome to move to Acton and area and vote for someone else in the next election. But to sue Ethel and keep her from acting on our behalf, is to silence our only voice at the Board table.

And it begs a question: Whose conflict and whose interest?



## Your LETTERS

### Runway show was a runaway success!

To the Editor,

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Acton Branch of the Canadian Cancer Society, to thank all those who contributed in one way or another to making our recent Fall Fashion Show a success!

Once again our local community came out to buy tickets and support the Cancer Society's fundraising efforts. We are grateful to Branch 197 of the royal Canadian Legion for allowing us the use of their wonderful facility and to the Legion Ladies for the use of their kitchen.

The Cancer Society would also like to express our sincere thanks to the olde Hide House and Elizabeth's

Fashions for the time and effort spent in putting together the fashion show. Thanks also to all the volunteer models – they did an excellent job!

The Georgetown Little Theatre loaned us the ramp and the Carpet Barn provided carpet for the runway. Acton IGA, Foodland, MacMillan's and Freezer Fenzy supplied food items. Halton Hills Furniture provided us with a beautiful chair and lamp for the stage, and Rene's Flowers loaned us a gorgeous floral stage decoration. Blooms Away flower shop provided us with two large plants to decorate the stage. Thanks to McNabb Graphics for the tickets and to Halton Cable and *The Acton Tanner* for advertising the fashion show.

Thank you to the following for provided door prizes: The olde Hide House, Elizabeth's Fashions, Blue Springs Flower Shop, Mulligan's Grill, Blooms Away, artist Linda Donais, Bruce Hood Travel and Country Reflections.

*Cathy Gerrow, Acton Branch  
Canadian Cancer Society*

### Euchre is every Friday night

#### LEGION NEWS

BY ALISON WILLMOTT  
Branch 197 P.R.O.

Do not forget progressive euchre is being held every Friday evening. Registration, at 7 pm, is just \$2. The fun begins at 7:30 pm.

Last Wednesday's bridge had two tables – winners were Lil Howson, Sandy Wilson, Betty Oakes, and Marjory Chase.

Last Thursday's euchre had mul-

tiple winners: first, Helen Otterbein, M. Holmes; second, Marg Wilson, Margaret Stronziwelk, Mary MacKinlay, Charlene, Gord Bryant; third, Jim Cook; and hidden score, E. Van der Heyden.

Saturday's meat draw winners were early birds Peggy Harris and Jack King. Regular winners were Gloria Dunne, Brad Timbers (2), Ed Molody, Cheryl Fulford, Jennifer Gagne, Marcel Poirier, Shorty Lowin, Jan Jensen, Neil Fulford, and Barry Hunter. Large prize winner was Marj Louttet.

If you have not visited us in a while, come on down for a visit.

### Same time last year ...

Actonites Frances Baker and Jackie Higgins won a trip to the Bahamas in a BBS TV network Blue Jay Baseball contest ... Some 100 voters turned up to watch school board trustee candidates debate at Acton High ... Tanner reader Rosemary Black received a Country Reflections gift basket for winning the Tanner Trivia contest.

## THE ACTON Tanner

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