

Trade regulations threaten health

Transnational corporations, NAFTA, globalization - 20 years ago terms like these either didn't exist or were largely unknown. Today there are commonplace. Over the last few decades, there has been an incredible push towards a global economy allowing the free access of corporations to markets and resources around the world. And it hasn't been good for our environment.

Transnational corporations and free trade agreements may seem far removed from our daily lives, but they affect all of us. Canadians are raised to believe in the autonomy of nation states - that a democratically elected government has the right, and the obligations, to make choices that are in the best interests of its citizens. But the interests of nation states are now being undermined, and in some cases overruled, by the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO is the global arbiter of trade disputes, and functions under the dubious assumption that any increase in economic activity will benefit society as a whole.

Under WTO leadership, trade and economics have usurped all other considerations, including environmental, scientific and social,

Science Matters

- by David Suzuki

that governments may have in establishing their own trade regulations. So a nation may want to maintain dolphin-free tuna or turtle-friendly prawns, but cannot because the WTO has ruled that these are unfair demands. In fact, the WTO has ruled against the environment in every one of the disputes brought to its tables! The result is that the lowest common denominator of environmental and public protection is adhered to - and that is often no protection at all.

The European Union, for example, does not want beef imported from North America that has been injected with potentially cancer-causing hormones, so the EU banned it in 1989. But the WTO declared that ban illegal, saying the EU has to prove the hormones cause cancer and it is fighting to allow the beef to be sold in Europe. In August, the

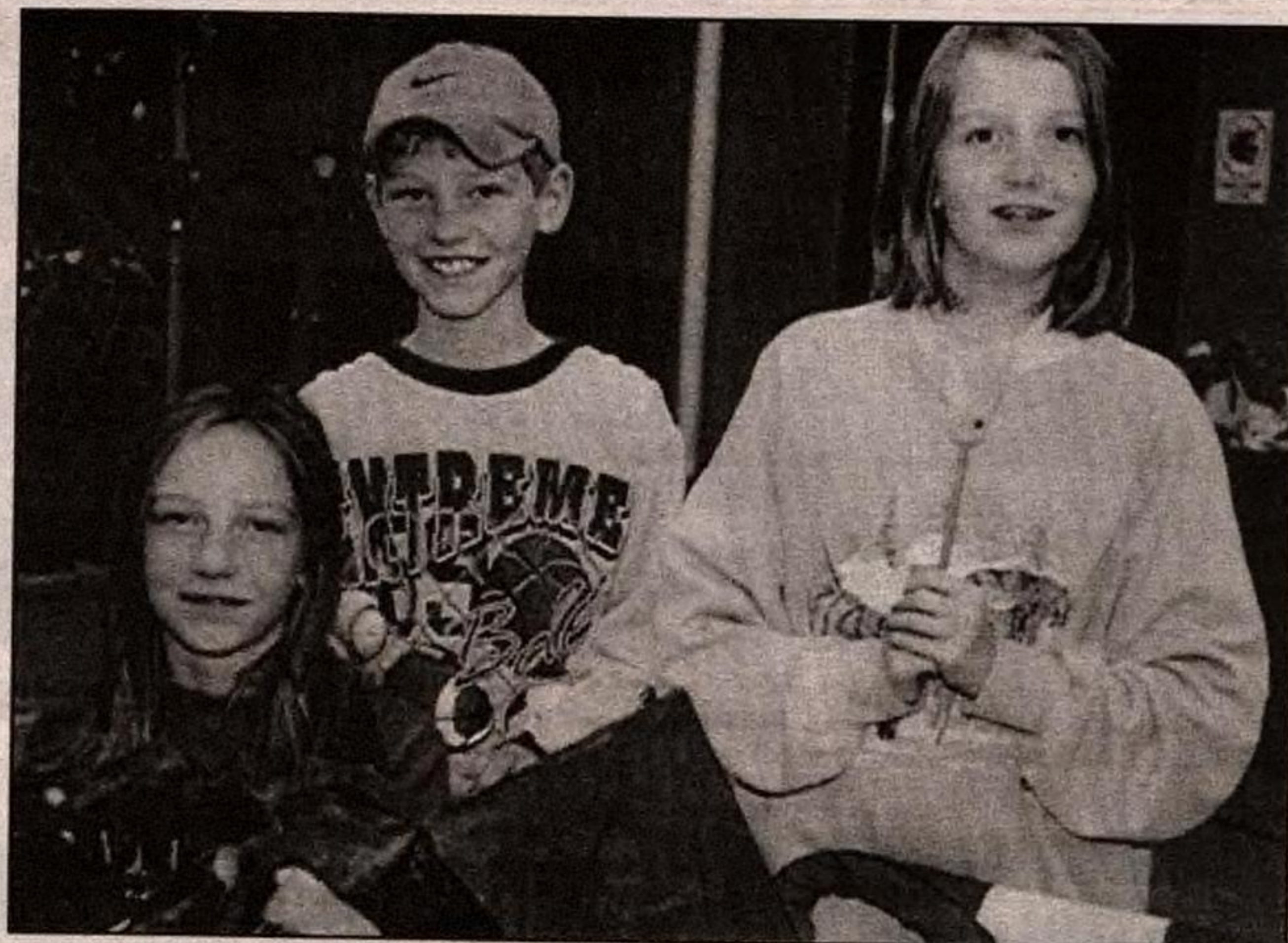
WTO agreed to allow the United States to impose a 100 per cent tariff on many European goods in an attempt to force the EU into accepting hormone-treated beef.

In the United States, the WTO recently overturned a law designed to protect endangered sea turtles from shrimp fishing, which is believed to kill more sea turtles than all other human activities combined. The 1996 US law had prohibited shrimp from being imported from counties that did not use a Turtle Exclusion Device on their shrimp harvesters - an inexpensive device that allowed turtles to escape shrimp nets. Four Asian countries challenged the law as an unfair trade practice and with WTO support forced the US to back down, weaken its requirements and thereby jeopardize an endangered species in the process.

By putting corporate interests above national priorities and lowering environmental standards, the WTO ensure the degradation of local ecosystems. It also increases health risks to consumers by putting the onus on the public to prove that a product is hazardous rather than on corporations to prove that it is safe. In a world of fast-depleting resources and growing concerns over the safety of the foods we eat and the chemicals we use, this approach surely takes us backwards.

Next week, the WTO will meet in Seattle for the Millennium Round session to discuss further so-called "trade liberalization" proposals, including one that would eliminate tariffs on forest products. If passed, it is expected to lead to an increase in the consumption of wood and paper products, and could encourage destructive logging practices by weakening environmental standards.

No doubt there will also be a large contingent of protesters at the Seattle conference calling for a reduction in the burgeoning powers of the WTO. Based on the WTO's track record when it comes to protecting public and environmental health, let us hope their voices are heard.



KID CRAFTERS: Parents weren't the only ones making crafts for sale at the Robert Little Parents' Council craft sale. Synnoeve Stockinger, 13, left, her brother Nils-Olav, 10 and sister Hjoerdis, 11, made several items including a dragon for customers. - Maggie Petrushevsky photo

Puccini's 'Gloria' Choral Society's Christmas present for Town

Georgetown Choral Society's annual Christmas concerts are a musical Yule treat people from all over Halton Hills look forward to every festive season. The 60 voice choir, with members from all over the Town, has enthralled audiences with their presentations over the years.

This year, on two evenings before Christmas, Friday, Dec. 10 and Friday, Dec. 17, Holy Cross Church in Georgetown will ring with the operatic sounds of Giacomo Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* as the Choral Society presents, "Gloria," under the able direction of A. Dale Wood.

Selections from Handel's

Cut taxes 20 % ...

a maximum of \$2,000 from \$1,725. Retail sales tax rebates on building materials for farmers will become permanent. The capital tax exemption for small businesses with capital of up to \$4 million will be enhanced to promote investment and job creation." The government's program of tax cuts to create jobs is working, Eves maintained. "The debate is over. Tax cuts create jobs."

Since 1995 more than 615,000 jobs have been created in Ontario, almost half of all the jobs created in Canada. Ontario employment numbers rose sharply in October with 43,600 new jobs, following on the heels of a substantial job growth in September of 28,800 jobs.

Messiah and some beautiful arrangements of favourite Christmas Carols complete the program.

Tenor Eugene Burke of Toronto is the featured soloist and the Talisker Players return to provide the orchestral accompaniment. The men of the choir are expected to steal the show as their voices soar through the closing of

Puccini's choral masterpiece, *Gloria*.

Tickets for the concerts are \$12, seniors' and students' are \$12. Special rates are available for groups of 10 or more by calling 877-5815. Tickets are available from choir members or The Freckled Lion on Main St., Georgetown and Bergsma's in the Marketplace mall.

Municipal Digest

Deaf facility

The public had a chance to comment on plans for a recreational facility for deaf developmentally delayed adults and a driving range on the northwest corner of Highway 25 and Campbellville Road yesterday (Wednesday).

The proposal on the 27.2 hectare site, owned by the Ontario Mission for the Deaf/Bob Rumble, would require amendments to the Region's Official Plan and zoning by-law to permit the driving range, day use facility and accessory uses. The property is zoned agricultural rural.

Golf pressures

The growing popularity of golf combined with a shortage of courses in the Greater Toronto Area is putting pressure on Halton to allow more golf courses below the brow of the Niagara Escarpment. Current planning rules call for golf courses to be directed above the brow. Local and Regional planning staff have launched a study of the competing land uses and to identify the pros and cons of golf courses from a financial, environmental, social and transportation perspective.

Halton's existing 31 golf facilities use almost 2,000 hectares of land. Sixteen of the facilities are in the rural area including only five that are above the Escarpment brow. Applications have been filed for seven new golf facilities - including a 27-hole course just east of Acton - and all but one of the new proposals involves rural land. A report

from the study is expected by the start of the gold season this spring.

Streamline deals

Good news for local developers who complain - always off the record - about the length of time it takes to process a development application through the Town. In an effort to streamline the process to execute subdivision, model home, preservicing, part lot control and condominium agreements, the Town has a new omnibus bylaw. It allows the Mayor and Clerk to execute the development agreements, once all conditions have been met, so developers won't have to wait two or three weeks until the next council meeting to get final approval. Councillors wanted assurances from staff that controversial developments would still come to Council for final approval.

Tech "refresh"

The Town will spend \$441,000 - approximately \$141,000 in each of the next three years - to lease 150 "best of the breed" Dell computers and five servers to replace 136 obsolete computers and servers, leased just three years ago.

"It is unfortunate that technology is changing so rapidly that we have to, every three of four years, refresh our equipment, but the staff are heavily reliant on computers," said Town CAO Steve Andrews.

The lease includes 18 PCs for the libraries, and PCs for the fire department and works yard.

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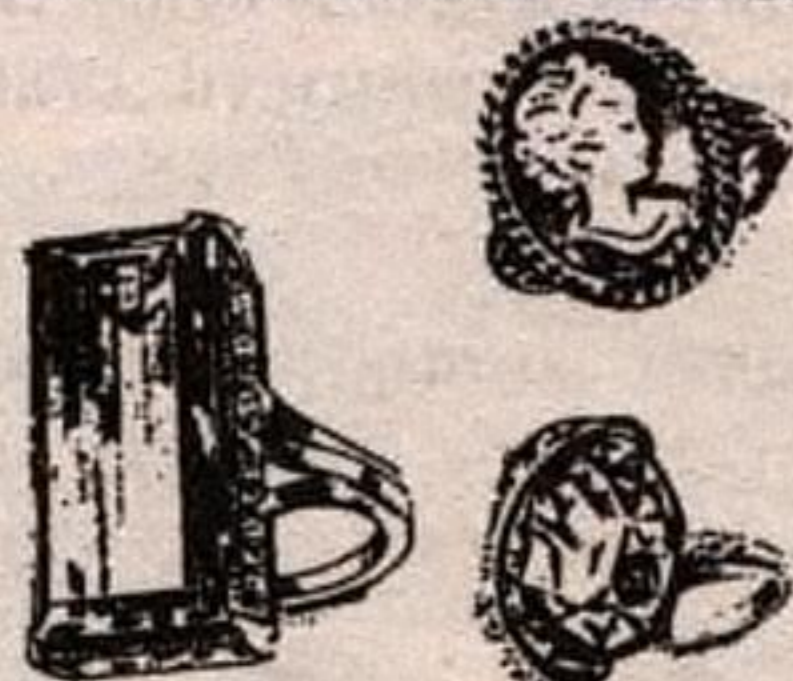
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