



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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A wise retreat

Halton Region's bid to back out of Milton's chlorine dispute was, as Mayor Gord Krantz pointed out, at the very least ill-timed.

Halton's move was endorsed at the committee level but derailed at full council, no doubt after some strenuous lobbying by Milton councillors.

Halton's blunder was a classic example of how the appearance of an action can be at least as damaging, if not more so, than the action itself.

The rationale was obviously to illustrate that regional officials had gone to bat for Milton in every way possible. Since they could do little more, the publicity attached to formally withdrawing from the controversy was to be a parting shot at provincial bureaucratic obstinacy.

But such an action was an error in judgment for a number of reasons.

First, it obviously alienated Milton politicians — witness the about-face at Halton Region within a week, when full council voted 12-8 to continue backing Milton's bid to stop dosing local water with chlorine. That was undoubtedly thanks to Milton's strong behind the scenes displeasure.

Second, Milton politicians are peevish when it comes to Halton already, given the snub to local politicians over water negotiations with Peel Region. Mr. Krantz badly wanted to represent Milton in those talks. He didn't get to do so. Instead two Oakville regional councillors and Joyce Savoline, Halton's regional chair, will carry the ball.

So now is not the time to further annoy or embarrass Milton representatives by bailing out on a cause that is politically explosive in this area.

As well, while local MP Ted Chudleigh has been turning up the heat at Queen's Park, and a petition to banish chlorine is making the rounds in Milton, it could only have been seen as an insensitive move, perhaps even an insult, if Halton had chosen to quit the field now.

There aren't any particularly strong omens indicating Milton will win the chlorine fight no matter how much local animosity is generated. Those who favour chlorination, including regional health officials and provincial bureaucrats, point to what they see as possible health risks if chlorination is stopped, and potential legal exposure as well should someone contract a serious infection traced to non-chlorinated water.

On top of that, an entrenched and seemingly immovable set of regulations surrounds chlorination, at the provincial level. To change them would mean at the very least gaining an exemption to those rules, or altering the rules themselves.

It may well be that the will of the people in Milton is not to be served on the chlorine issue. Time will tell, but meanwhile local political representatives — at Halton Region as well as Milton council — must be sensitive to the fact that the situation is fluid, and Milton's adversaries should not be presented with any developments they could view as advantageous. One such development would be a weakening of resolve at Halton Region, or, equally damaging, the perception of faltering.

Rob Kelly



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the July 3, 1996 issue

- In an unprecedented move, the Milton District Hospital board of directors agreed to pay a local obstetrician for his on-call services. The hospital board agreed to pay Dr. Sushil Suppal, Milton's only obstetrician, \$50,000 minus the amount of money he expected to receive from the provincial government to help fund the cost of his malpractice insurance. The provincial government's Bill 26 had threatened to cut off subsidies to doctors for the high insurance. But after much protest from doctors, Premier Mike Harris announced that subsidies would be provided for obstetricians.

- After 33 years in the Halton public school system, Chuck McDonald was retiring. Mr. McDonald had been principal at Milton's E.W. Foster School since 1990 and had been principal at numerous Burlington schools since he began teaching in 1963.

- The Milton and District Horticultural Society was preparing to bring back a popular event among Milton residents. Back by popular demand was the organization's Garden Competition, an event that had not been held since 1989. Since then the group had been busy gamering prestige outside the immediate area. It received an award from the Ontario Horticultural Association and its work at Town Hall had been featured in a book. The contest would award 28 prizes to gardeners in Milton as well as the surrounding communities.

20 Years Ago

From the July 6, 1977 issue

- Transport officials from the Ontario and federal governments were scheduled to meet in the upcoming weeks to iron out a cost sharing program for the expansion of GO Train service to Milton and Streetsville. Dr. Frank Philbrook, Liberal MP for Halton, was optimistic about the situation. He said the provincial government was "ready to get cracking" and all that was needed was the expected commitment from the federal government.

50 Years Ago

From the July 3, 1947 issue

- After 25 years of butchering meat in Milton, Robert J. Armstrong was retiring on account of ill health. Mr. Armstrong had operated Milton's West-end Meat Market since 1942 when he took over from Gordon McLellan who went off to war. Mr. Armstrong was to leave the butcher shop in the capable hands of his assistant Ross Holmes.

- Provincial police had to discipline a pair of young hoodlums who committed acts of vandalism in the Campbellville area. The two juveniles were connected with the removal of the roof of a boat house belonging to the Milton Fishing Club. Three boats were also submerged in the water and another was set adrift. Constable Lemon apprehended and warned them it would not be tolerated.

Pud

by Steve Nease

