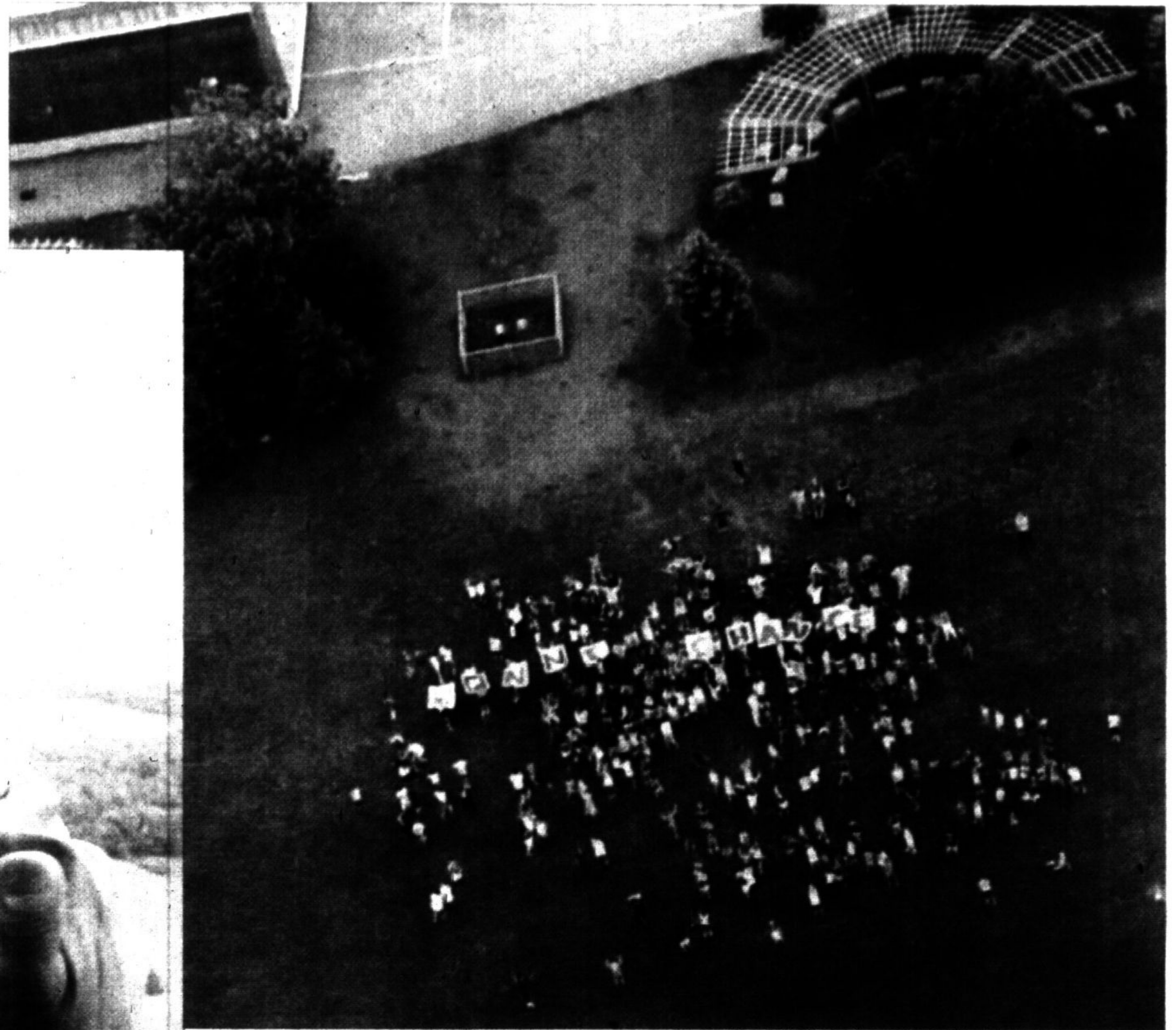


HIGH-FLYING FAREWELL

Marlene Boulanger, a teacher at Whitchurch Highlands Public School, retired last week. To celebrate, the staff arranged a surprise helicopter ride over the Warden Avenue school for Madame Boulanger. All 295 students and all the staff watched from the field, cheering and holding up letters that read "BONNE CHANCE". "Madame has brought so much to the WHIPS community," said principal Marni Collier. "We will all miss her."



PHOTOS COURTESY WHITCHURCH HIGHLANDS PUBLIC SCHOOL

Resignations, byelections add up and for what result?

Do you find yourself alarmed by all the Liberal MPPs walking away from their jobs, even though they're the ones who ran in the election less than two years ago and as far as we could tell, they knew it was a four-year commitment?

All of us have days when we'd love to tell the boss take this job and shove it on to someone else's desk, we're outta here.

We don't because we have bills to pay and family to support. We don't because we love our jobs.

Or we don't, maybe because we don't have the kind of severance packages MPPs enjoy to ease their transition from premier or cabinet minister to highly paid consultant, government appointee, director on a corporate board or Harvard fellow.

In the real world you don't get severance unless you're severed.

If you quit, well, sorry to see



Bernie O'Neill

you go, but we're not writing a big cheque as a thank you for leaving us of your own volition.

But politics is not the real world.

It was reported Dalton McGuinty received more than \$300,000 after announcing in October he would step down a year after being re-elected. Three cabinet ministers, Dwight Duncan, Chris Bentley and

Laurel Broten, each get \$250,000. MPP Margaret Best, the most recent to abandon ship, gets \$100,000.

Political types will tell you they need this type of compensation to attract quality candidates such as themselves.

Are any of York Region's Liberal MPPs about to join them and get while the getting is good?

Meanwhile, the Aug. 1 byelections will cost us millions, producing little effect and are a frustration when three of them didn't need to be held until the fall.

I can tell you from years working in community news that after the last day of school when summer has officially begun, interest in politics drops to somewhere between yawn and zzzzz as people turn their attentions to the barbecue, beach, fishing, swimming, people

watching and just getting time off in nice weather. Napping, mowing the lawn or washing the car garner more interest, just ahead of hosing down the driveway.

If you're the betting type, it would be worth putting money down on these byelections, to be held the Thursday before the August long weekend, to have the lowest voter turnout in history, gas plant scandal or not.

The way the seats break down, even if all five are won by the NDP or Progressive Conservatives, or the Liberals win them themselves, the Liberals would remain in the exact same spot, with a minority government.

So it will be much ado about nothing and my guess would be most voters will not bother.

Why are the MPPs leaving?

They don't like being in a minor-

ity government? They don't like their chances under Kathleen Wynne? They don't like the NDP setting the agenda? They were passed over for cabinet posts? They were loyal to Dalton and now that he's gone, their hearts aren't in it? They see the writing on the wall — the Liberals cannot stay in power forever? They see some of the scandals of the McGuinty years coming home to roost?

Look at it whatever way you choose. I'm just not sure why actions that would make the average person visiting the employment insurance office be turned away with, "Sorry, no benefits if you just quit" should bring a windfall just because you're an MPP.

Stouffville resident Bernie O'Neill is a York Region Media Group editor.

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