

Board, EA talks going nowhere

The Halton District School Board and its educational assistants remain at a contractual impasse after a third mediation session resolved nothing.

The president of the Halton District Educational Assistants Association said the latest meeting last week, which included a provincial mediator, resulted in no new proposals from the board.

Lynne Gurzi said the board presented the same offer it had in June.

She said that contract proposal was rejected by a 340-9 vote by the EA membership; the same deal was rejected outright by the EA's negotiating team this week.

There are no new dates for talks. The Halton EAs' contract expired more than a year ago.

Educational assistants work primarily with special education students in Halton's public elementary and high schools, although they are also found in JK and SK classes and in large class settings.

Gurzi's group consists of about 400 permanent and term-specific workers as well as about 120 casual and supply personnel.

EAs have been essentially working to rule since the group announced it was putting 13 sanctions in place effective Sept. 2.

Halton board trustees quickly passed a couple of resolutions in response to the sanctions.

The board authorized the director of education, its top administrator, to deduct pay from EAs if they don't abide by their contractual duties. The board also gave the education director the power to lock out EAs or even close schools if he deems the safety of students or the security of board property is compromised by the sanctions.

Dawn Beckett-Morton, lead contract negotiator for the Halton public board, says it has offered a two-year deal that is worth almost 16 per cent in salary and benefit improvements to the majority of EAs, including a provision that would increase the paid work day to six hours from 5.5 hours.

Gurzi said the offer from the board equals a \$1.15 per hour increase over two years but that EAs at other boards have been getting raises in the \$1.45-\$1.55 range.

She reiterated her claim that Halton's EAs are the worst paid in the Greater Toronto Area.

Beckett-Morton countered by saying Halton EAs' remuneration is almost identical to their counterparts in Hamilton-Wentworth.

Beckett-Morton also noted that none of the Halton board's employee groups is a wage leader and that that is a function of government funding available to the board.

—By Tim Whitnell, special

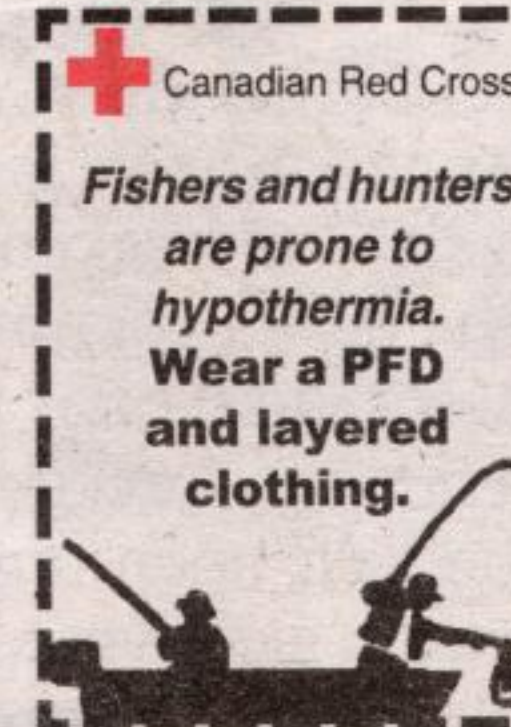


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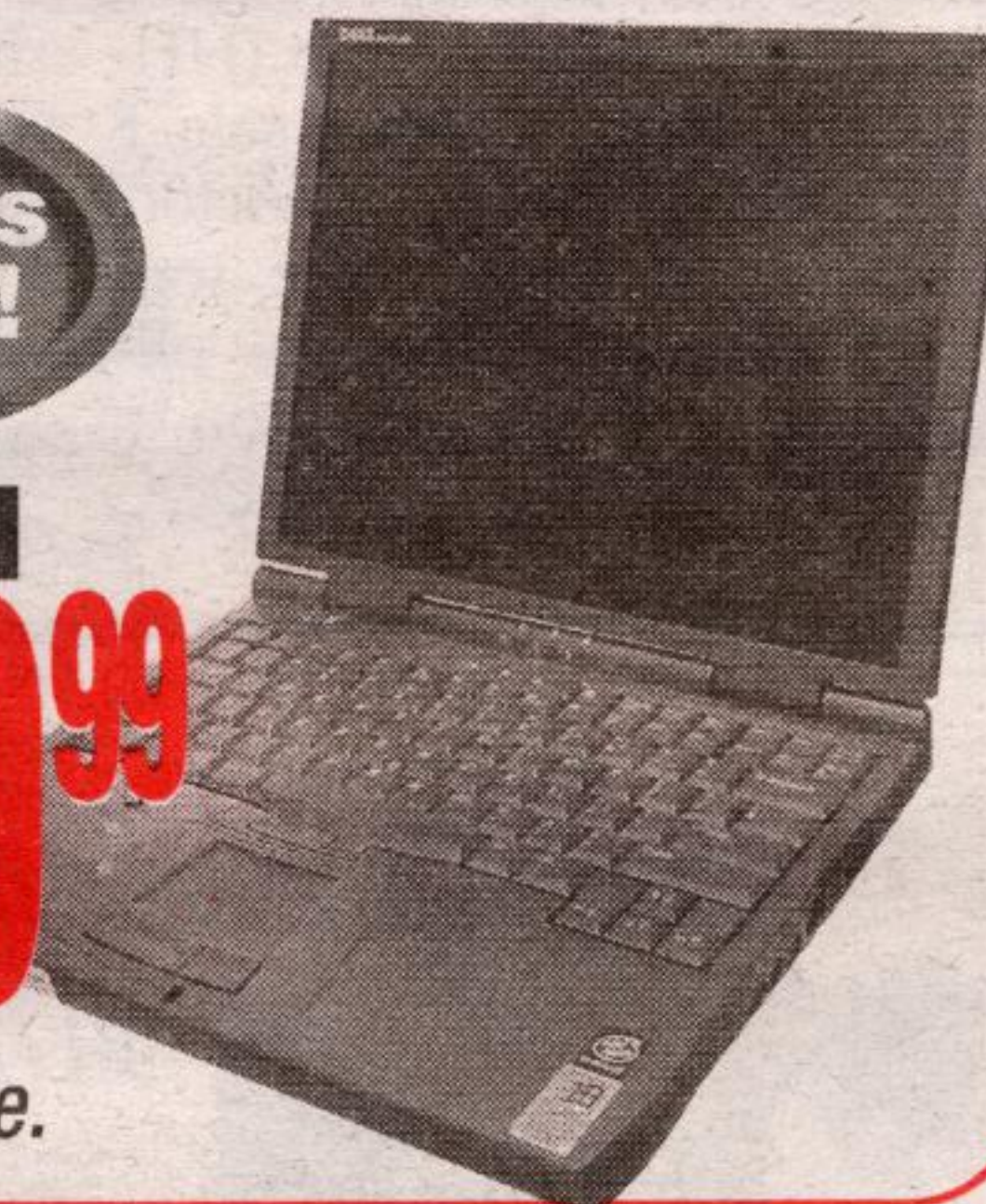
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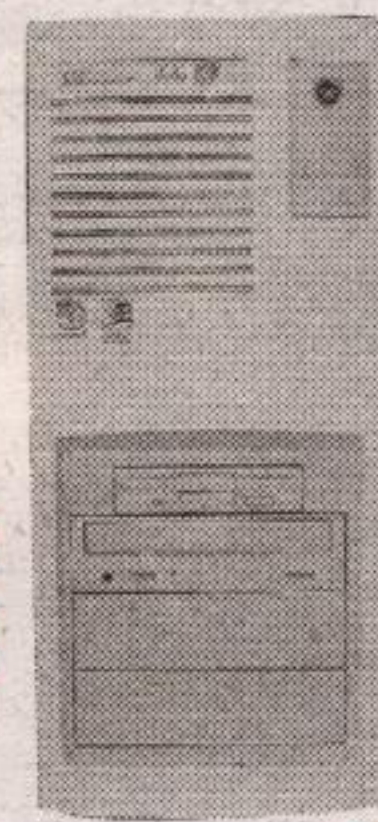
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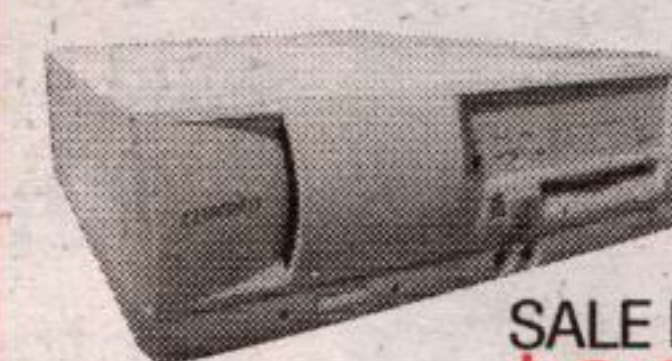
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