

# Why can't the Catholic board settle?

Dear Editor:

My daughter is in Grade 11 at Bishop Reding Secondary School in Milton. She and I are frustrated that extracurricular activities at Bishop Reding have been cancelled because the Halton Catholic School Board has been unable to reach an agreement with its high school teachers.

While I am sure that the teachers are not blameless, from my perspective, the Catholic board's performance is fairly simple to assess. It has not reached an agreement with its high school teachers. Other boards throughout Ontario, including the Halton public one, have.

The quality of our children's education is determined by the quality of their entire school life. The social and life skills that they acquire in athletics, band, drama, students council etc. are at least as important as what they learn in class.

Reaching a deal with the teachers is the only solution that will ensure resumption of extracurricular activities. So why is it that in Halton, public high school teachers have a contract and their students have the benefit of extracurricular programs, while the teachers and students of Catholic high schools don't?

The Halton public and Catholic school boards both have to work within the same framework that the provincial government established via Bill 160. They both operate in the same municipalities, so their costs should be similar. They both receive money from the provincial government under the same per student funding formula. In fact, as a result of equalization of funding for Catholic schools, the public board has had to endure funding cuts, while the Catholic board has had its funding substantially increased.

The Catholic board would be quick to complain that teachers are preventing a deal, in part because their union's decisions are being centrally controlled with

minimal local teacher involvement.

If union decisions are being made centrally, one can assume that the positions that the teachers are taking in negotiations with boards throughout the province are reasonably consistent. This raises the obvious question — why have the teachers' proposals been acceptable to other boards, but not to the Halton Catholic one?

I believe that it is simply a matter of approach. Halton public board members openly admit that they don't really like the deal that they negotiated with their teachers. However, they appreciated that it was the best that they could do in the very difficult situation that the provincial government had put them in. The Halton public board quite logically concluded that a less than perfect deal was better for their students than no deal at all.

The Catholic board seems to be taking a different approach. They have issued news releases on the status of negotiations that, in my view, can best be described as propaganda. This undoubtedly enrages teachers and makes a settlement even more difficult.

My impression is that some Halton Catholic board members don't seem prepared to show the leadership and flexibility that other boards have shown in getting their high schools back to normal.

The provincial government seems to be at war with many school boards across the province. Some even think boards will be abolished. While I am not a fan of Mike Harris on matters of education, based on the performance of the Halton Catholic School Board on this issue, Mr. Harris will be hard to argue against.

John London  
Acton

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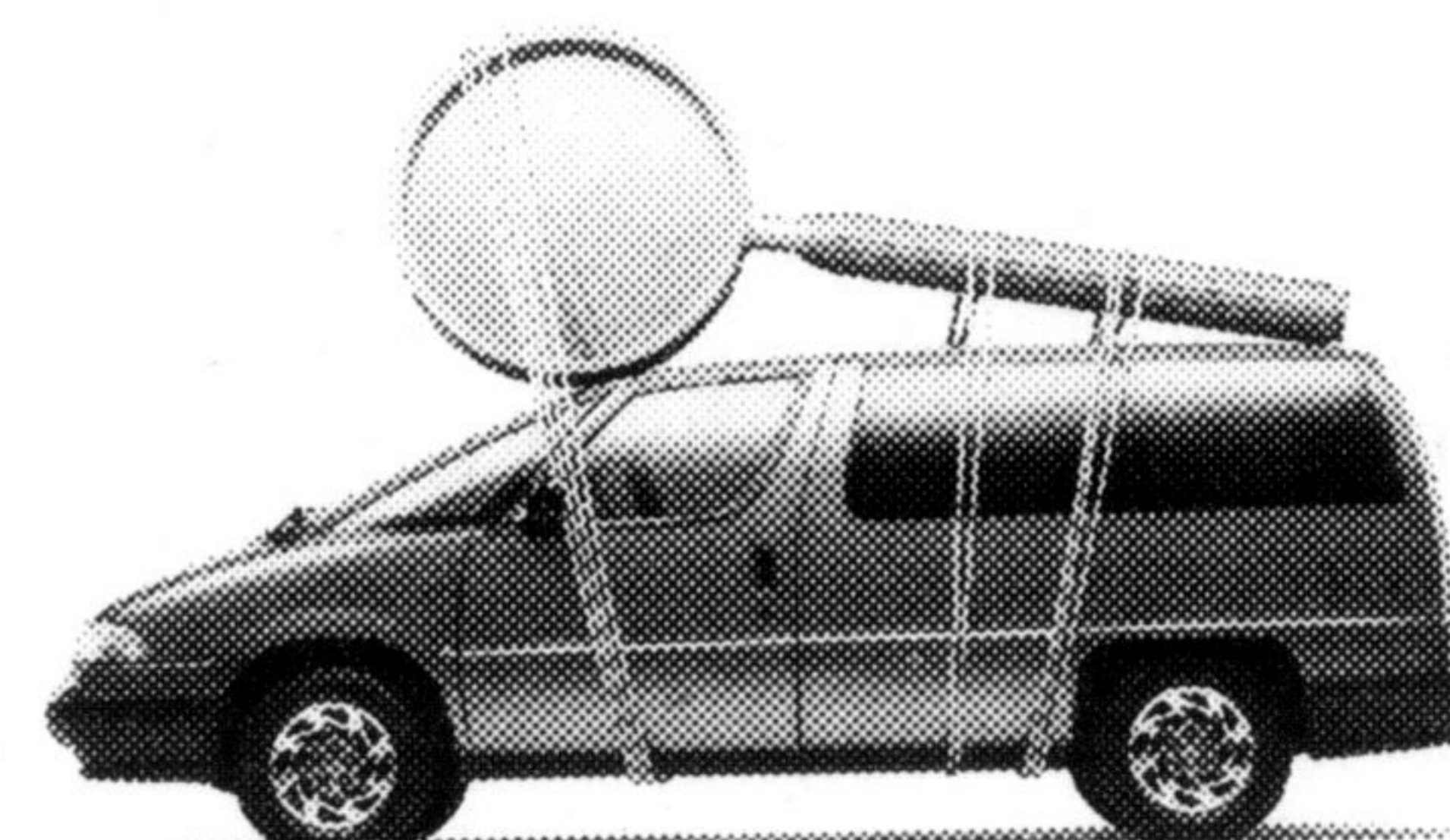
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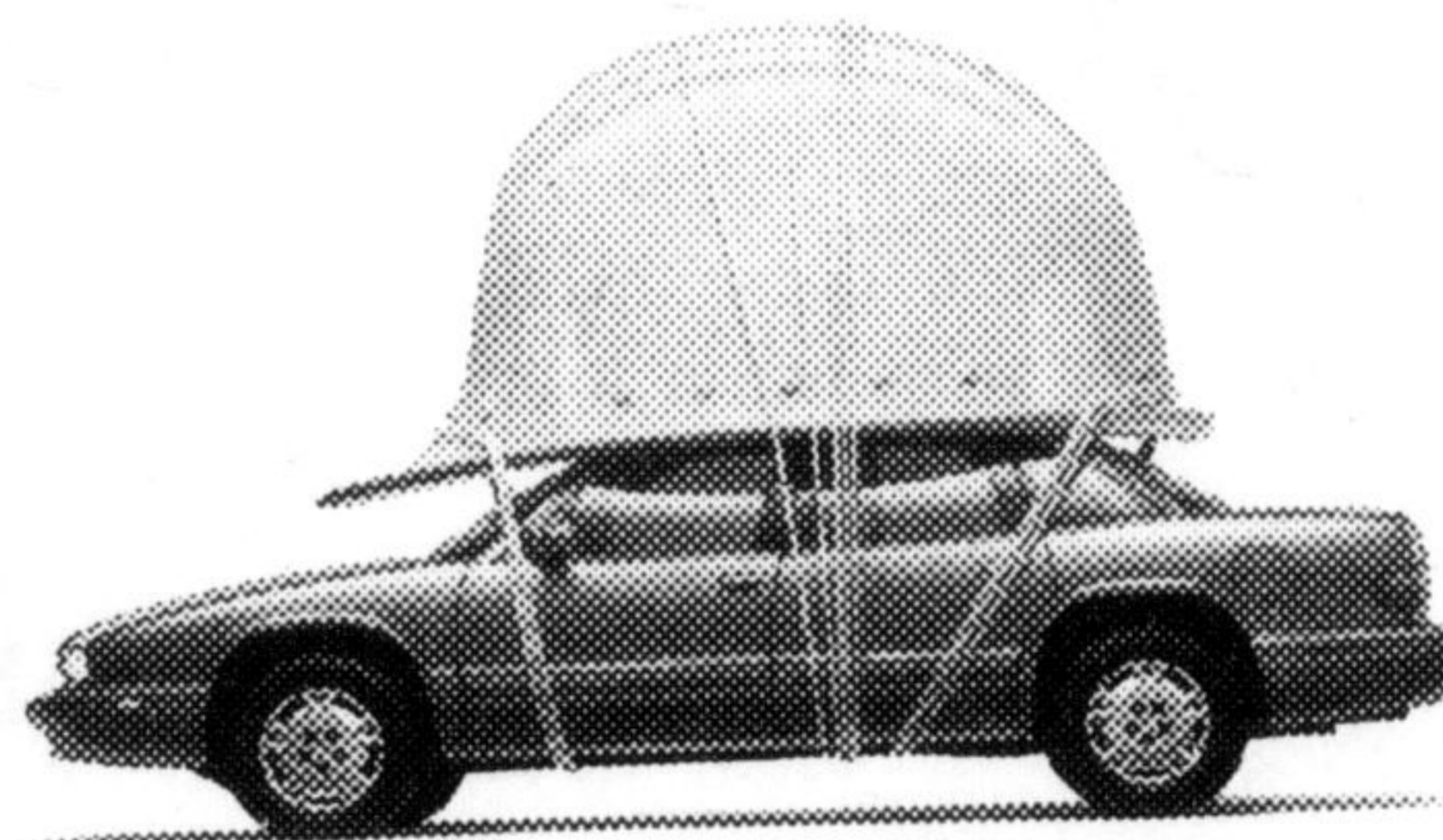
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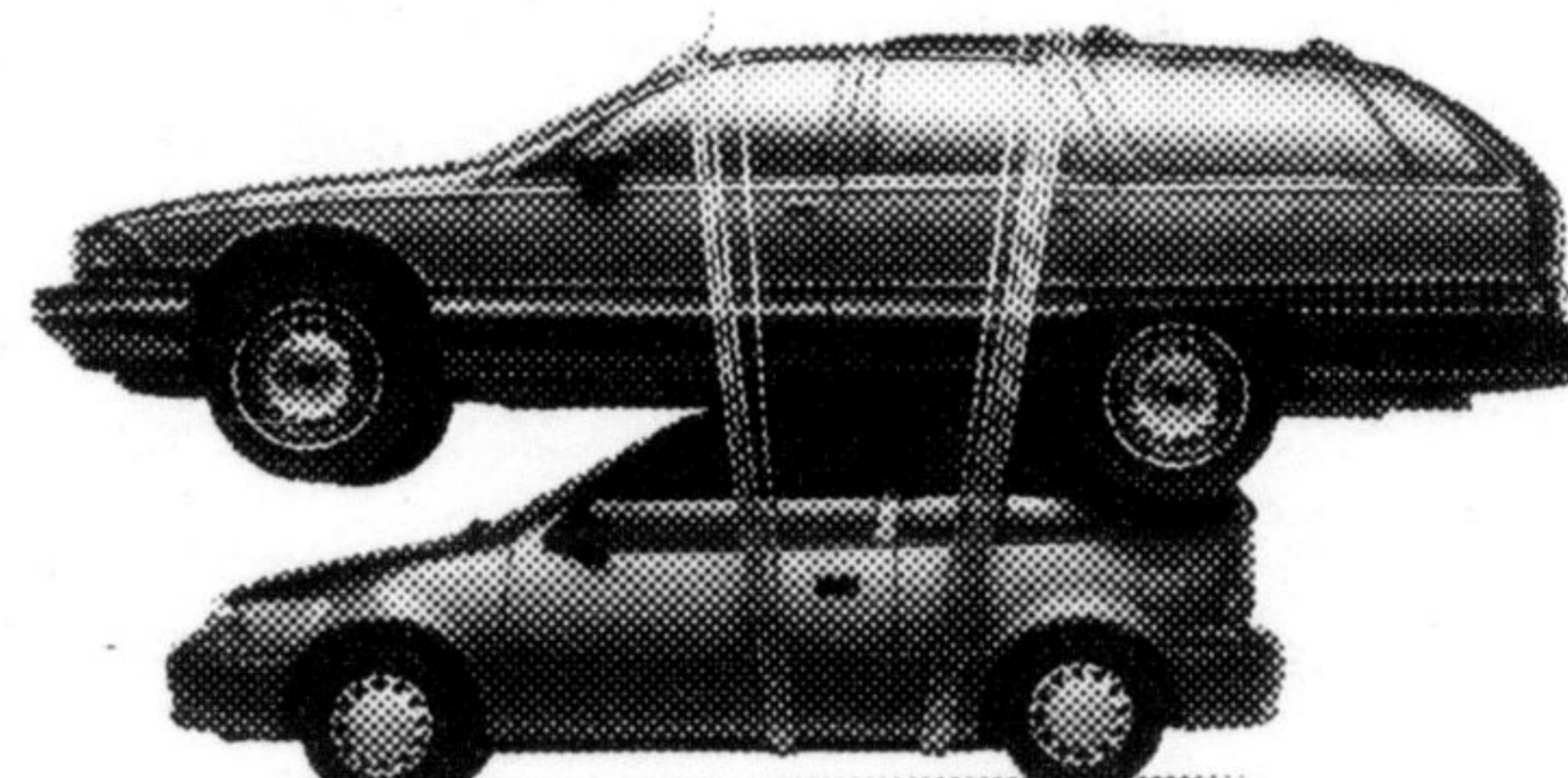
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