

Milton RC trustees aren't likely to be swayed on council issue

By BRAD REAUME

The Champion

A controversial separate school board policy requiring members of parent councils to be Catholics may not be official, says Milton Trustee Mary Lou Loughlin, but she is not about to change her stance.

Policy changes require a two-thirds majority of the board. The original vote on the matter did not fulfill that requirement, so the issue will be returned to the committee level and dealt with again.

Ms Loughlin, who voted in support of the policy when it passed 7-5, said she feels strongly about it and will not likely change her vote at the June 18 committee meeting. She did say she has not closed all avenues to resolve the issue.

"According to the minister (of education) parent councils are advisory boards but I hear about shared power with trustees in the future, and I hear they might take over from trustees entirely. Right now trustees must be Catholics, so I'm only extending that requirement over to the new councils," said Ms Loughlin. She added she welcomes telephone calls on the issue and would like to find a solution which satisfies everyone.

"It upsets me that people think we're trying to exclude them," Ms Loughlin said. "There are places on subcommittees for non-Catholics."

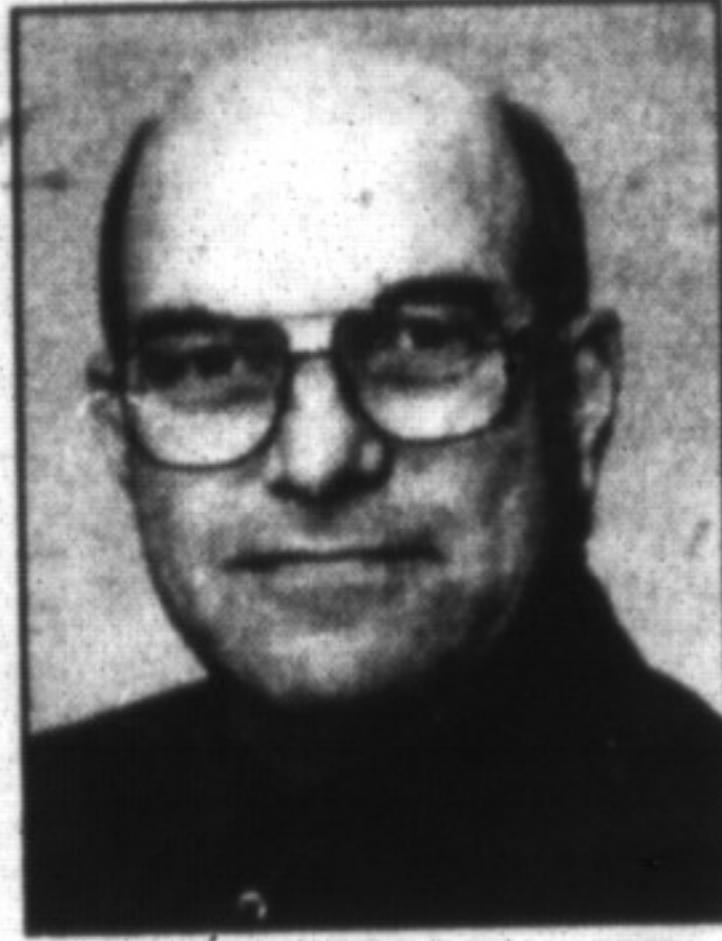
Alison Filteau, whose husband is Catholic, and who has two children attending St. Peter's School in Milton, is adamantly opposed to the policy. She says she is being discriminated against on the basis of her religion, despite a constitutional guarantee of freedom from religious persecution.

"Because I'm not Catholic they say I'm not good enough to sit on government-mandated councils," said Ms Filteau, who added she was a strong supporter of the separate school system, and wanted her children to have a Christian education.

Ms Filteau said she is pondering speaking to the board's committee and will continue to lobby trustees



Mary Lou Loughlin



Joe Deoni

and organize parents on the issue.

Ms Filteau said she was told by board officials that her husband could speak for her as part of the parent council, but she feels she is entitled to her own voice, especially in light of the substantial amount of volunteering she does at the school. "I came from Quebec 18 months ago and saw my rights as an anglophone taken away one by one, and all the while people were doing it with a smile," she said. "By the time anyone realized what was happening it was too late. I'm not going to let anything like that happen here."

Ms Filteau said she could accept a compromise where up to a third of parent board positions would be held by non-Catholics.

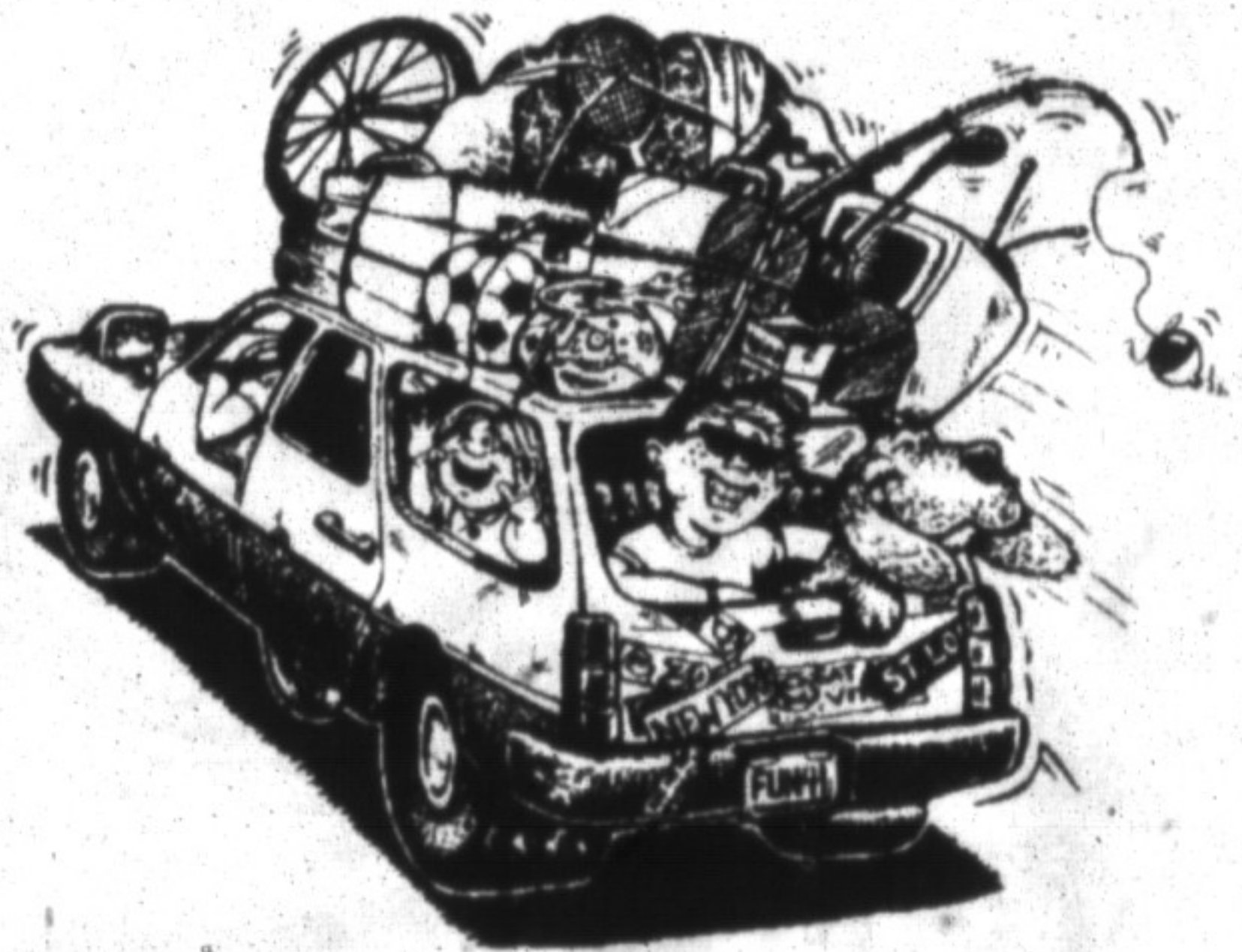
Joe Deoni, Milton's rural ward separate school trustee, said he had to vote for the Catholic-only policy given that of his 1,073 constituents, only 42 are in interfaith marriages.

Mr. Deoni said the rights of Catholics and non-Catholics have all been decided by the courts, so he refuses to discuss the issue on those grounds.

"I stand by my vote, I have no choice," he said. "The non-Catholics who want a say can vote through their Catholic spouse, so they do have someone to speak and vote for them."

Mr. Deoni said if people disagree with him they can say so in the next municipal election.

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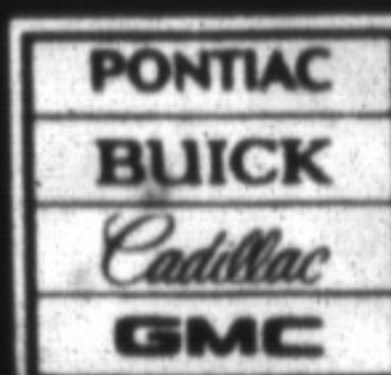
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