

After Teachers Go Back—What?

For those school districts which now are entering the second week of teacher strikes, the task is over. Youthful glee at having an unscheduled extension of summer vacation must now give way to mounting irritation and citizen unrest, leading to pressure on both sides to get on with the job.

Even so, as new contracts emerge one by one, there still lives in this corner the same sense of bewilderment which I first expressed editorially in the Plymouth Mail & Observer at the end of that district's regrettable 25-day strike in 1969.

"If it was possible to reach an agreement by 3 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 27 which was acceptable to both sides — each of whom gave a bit from previously adamant positions — then why in formation weren't these adversaries able to reach a similar settlement on the morning of Tuesday, Sept. 2 when the strike action was voted?"

This has been Michigan's worst year ever for teacher strife in the public schools, yet eventually settlement is inevitable in every district. Unfortunately, that may be all it is — settlement, not a cure.

Strike coverage is not new to this reporter and, in fact, dates back to tumultuous Flint of the late '30s when the three Reuther brothers and unionists such as Homer Martin, Dick Travis and Betty Simpson were names on every tongue of the community.

Mayhap the mood of that area hasn't changed much in three and a half decades for one, notes that of the 29 strikes continuing in Michigan Monday morning, six were in Flint and its suburbs.

I must admit that rarely have I understood the necessity of a strike in any field of endeavor, but this applies particularly to school teaching. To occur, there must be a complete breakdown in communication and trust.

Plymouth paid a very dear price for its 1969 strike in the sense of community moral scars which only now are beginning to fade.

A lesser price was the immediate adjustment which was necessary in the 1968-70 school calendar to make up for 17 classless days: spring vacation was cut to two days, (Good Friday and Easter Monday) and the spring semester was extended to June 28. Oh, yes, teachers also were required to devote four Saturdays as their in-service workshops.

Parallel steps can be expected wherever strikes now continue so that the eventual school year may be brought to the state-mandated minimum of 180 days of student educational instruction.

On the extremely rare occasions when school board members bother to defend their practice of secret meetings, they usually give the same reasons, apparently memorized from an association meeting, for keeping the public in the dark.

One is that delicate personnel matters are being discussed; another, that real estate is to be purchased and they don't want to drive the land price up; still another, that a student discipline case is under appeal.

That, of course, is a rationalization. Most boards discuss many other things behind closed doors. Let's consider Clareneville, South Redford and Southfield.

A couple of weeks ago, the Clareneville Board of Education, Norman L. Hunt presiding, was about to set the tax rate for the year. No personnel matters. No real estate transactions. No student discipline cases.

The board then went into what is euphemistically called an "executive" session for 20 minutes, leaving the public to cool its heels. Afterwards, it came out and voted on the matter.

Why the secrecy? In the most basic single action a board can take — putting a monetary value on the program priorities for school children — why should it supposedly honest group of mature, adult males have to go into hiding before making a decision?

Despite an angry warning from this corner, the South Redford Board of Education, Richard Guregan presiding, held a secret meeting to discuss which elementary schools it would close if a millage proposal were defeated by the voters.

The lame excuse was that real estate values would be affected. Well, real estate values would be affected any way when the decision was made public, any way.

Now is the time, too, when teachers begin coming up empty on what were supposed to be pay days. In Plymouth they missed two of them, and for some it was necessary to hurry to their friendly banks and credit unions to hustle up some grocery cash.

In the end, of course, they all got the full salaries as provided in the new contract (including raises), and here lies one of sources of irritation to a large segment of the lay public. They cannot understand why teachers aren't penalized for the days they refuse to work.

Later on, the real reason came out: Board members simply didn't want voters, taxpayers and parents breathing down their necks. The attitude seems to be: We, The Elders, will decide what's good for you, and we'll let you know later what we have decided.

Fortunately, the millage passed last Saturday. In Southfield, they are a little more honest about secrecy than in Clareneville or South Redford. The Southfield board voted 5-2 to continue holding study sessions in bussey.

Dr. Harold Bussey, a board member, made the incredible statement that the board isn't trying to hide anything, and the public is always made aware of how each board member votes on the final decision.

For the benefit of the many Dr. Busseys on our school boards, there are many reasons why a school board should do more than take its formal votes in public.

The public has a right to know what options the board considered before making a decision.

The public has a right to know which proposals were rejected before the final choice was made.

The public has a right to know board members' reasons for doing what they did. As anyone who has ever seen the inside of a secret meeting knows, the sugar-coated reasons a board member gives in public and his true reasons are often two different things.

The public has a right to know who influenced a board's decision. Typically, the seven-member board has other persons into its meetings — administrators, real estate men, pressure group representatives. The public should be able to see that influence.

The public has a right to have someone input — to make suggestions, to speak, to build up a case for either re-electing or defeating board members.

That is why secret meetings are so deplorable.

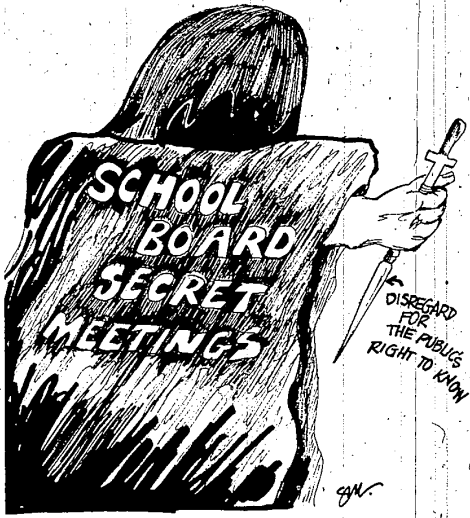
In fact, the bloke of average mentality finds it hard to understand, too, how those in a profession which the law bars from striking in the first place can get away with taking such defiant power in their own hands.

The easiest answer to that is the fact that their mass numbers make the law inoperable, and there aren't enough teeth in it to make it work any way.

Even after all the smoke clears this fall, there will be a lingering sense of foreboding as to what future years will bring. The militancy of the Michigan Education Association is all too

well spelled out in its task force recommendations; of statewide bargaining strategy to think we are embarking on an era of peace and serenity in confrontations between teachers and school boards.

The professionalism in the approach to negotiations we have seen in some districts and the lack of animosity with which their bargaining was conducted is offset by the enthusiasm for creating a statewide crisis (atmosphere on the part of the MEA's "professional strikers"). It is a time for rationality and truth on both sides of the bargaining table.



'Old Lady' Fires Back At Sex, Marital Bias

EDITOR: I am in the age and sex categories of those "old ladies in their 40s, 50s, and 60s" referred to and complained about by Ronald Jones (Leon Doolin) concurring in the Readers' Forum on Aug. 20.

Mr. Jones wrote that those "old ladies would be better off at home" so that more substitute teaching jobs would be available for young husbands like himself. He also stated that he felt the practice of hiring teachers from outside the community was unfair.

I would like to address myself to Mr. Jones and Mr. Doolin. Gentlemen, what makes you believe you are better or as well qualified for the job as other applicants? Hiring and keeping teachers or anyone else, for that matter, should be done on the bases of skill, potential, and devotion to the job. Age, race, color, creed, sex, marital status and even residence or tenure in some cases should not influence the decision to employ anyone.

READERS' FORUM

Please type (or write clearly) and limit letters to 300 words. Letters must be signed, with the writer's address. Names will be withheld only at the writer's request and for good cause. The editor reserves the right to reject unsuitable letters.

Don't Hire The Prejudiced

EDITOR: In a recent edition of this newspaper, a letter appeared which was written by two young men unable to secure teaching jobs in Plymouth. They did not discuss their qualifications, but rather they belabored the fact that because they are young, male and supporting families they deserve jobs. Strong prejudices against both women and older people were evident in their letter.

GENO TAVERNARO Livonia

Milk Program Badly Needed

EDITOR: Please print this address for people to write to complain about the rise in milk at schools, not only in Plymouth but all over.

There is a "Special Milk Program" that has been discontinued and thus the rise in prices, as the state was reimbursing the schools four cents per half-pint of milk.

Last year it cost me \$21.60 approximately to buy four 1/2 pints of milk this year it'll cost me \$72. I certainly would urge everyone to write to urge the "Special Milk Program" be reinstated so all kids can afford milk.

Write Mr. James Burroughs, Michigan Dept. of Education, Food Program, Lansing, Michigan 48906. MRS. P. ROBERTSON Plymouth

The firemen from Engine Company 2 (at Farmington and Plymouth Roads) re-

Legislators' Mail Tab: \$43,403

On Thursday, Aug. 9, a fire occurred in my house, causing extensive damage to approximately 50 per cent of the building. As a result, my family and I will have to reside elsewhere until the repairs are completed.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my and my family's appreciation to the Livonia Fire Department for a job that was well done.

Other state representatives spent: Thomas Brown (D-Westland), \$3,502; Raymond Smit (R-Ann Arbor), \$2,338; Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park), \$1,922; John Bennett (D-Redford Township), \$1,803; William Keith (D-Garden City), \$1,692; R. Robert Geake (R-Northville), \$1,690; and Raymond Baker (R-Farmington), \$95.

Is FEA Wrong In Grid Practice Ban?

There always are some individuals and groups that lose in all strikes, just as there are many who benefit from labor strife.

But in Farmington why the striking teachers will have a hard time proving to members of the football squads at the three high schools that anyone is going to benefit this time around.

For more than a month the youngsters have been working out, getting in top shape for the season that is supposed to open Friday but won't for North Farmington, Farmington Harrison, and Farmington High.

The reason, the coaches have been forbidden by the

school buildings for anything until later in the year.

Only Farmington and Birmingham schools were hit by the Michigan High School Athletic Association code. Birmingham reached a tentative agreement with the school board and grid practices were resumed Saturday, qualifying the teams there to play the opening game this weekend as scheduled.

Every other squad in the area continued practices, many in areas where strikes still continue. The difference is the coaches there have contracts for coaching and thus were allowed to continue their training.

This sad indeed that such things had to happen to Ron Holland and his North Farmington squad this year.

Just three years back, Ron had the finest team in Michigan and walked off with state championship honors.

He has spent the last two years rebuilding and reports are that North has prospects for its best team ever.

What a sad time for the gridders? Members of a squad that could take it all but already has lost its opening test by cancellation and may not be allowed to play its second game.

The same story can well be said of Harrison and Farmington. Each school thought this would be a better than average year... but who knows when the players will be able to show their skills.

More than that, there are a good many disturbed parents who have watched their youngsters go through long drills for what could well be nothing if the strike isn't resolved.

These are members of the bands, the cheerleaders, the

drum majors and majorettes. These are the members of the golf and cross country teams and all other varsity units that compete in the fall.

None is allowed to practice, coaches and directors can't work with their proteges until contracts are approved.

There isn't any question that the strike will be settled but it is leaving a bad taste in the mouths of parents who have been staunch boosters of the teachers in the past.

It's an even bet they won't be in the future and a good deal of the fault lies with the teachers themselves.

How would you like to be one of the Farmington youngsters sitting on the stands at a contest in another community while thinking of the season opener for his school that won't take place?

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