

Johnson: Dispute shouldn't impede student education

In this period of crisis, Principal Curtis Johnson has one main objective: Improving the student's education. "I would like to have activities for all students," he said. "Our schedule is set up to provide activities for the students and the reason we don't have activities now isn't their fault."

Johnson hasn't been directly involved in the negotiations because of the closed nature of many of the school board meetings. However, he is interested in ending the dispute as soon as possible. He feels that the students could affect the negotiations by putting pressure on their parents who can, in turn, constrain both sides.

"So far, the students have handled the situation very well." Although many activities need trained adults to help conduct them, other activities can be, and have been operated minimally. Some resource people can be found outside the school," he said.

Johnson believes a strike would be a negative approach to this dispute. "The parents and taxpayers would see the strike

and refuse to finance more for education."

The teacher-school board disputes are largely results of state law outlining a procedure for contract talks. According to Johnson, the present contract law "does not provide for an efficient way to come to an agreement."

Johnson also said that the wage scale disagreements were not the only reasons for withholding activities. "It depends on the individual teachers. You can't generalize about it."

What long range solution is there for the salary problem? Johnson indicated that some sort of merit pay system might be feasible. Under this teachers would be paid on the basis of the quality of their teaching.

"So far it has been tried in a few schools of the U.S., and in these it hasn't lasted long. However, that doesn't mean that it wouldn't work in the future.

Johnson pointed out that there are pros and cons to the present wage scale. "The system may stop a good teacher from excelling or attract a bad teacher."

Schultz airs views

In the opinion of Judge Harold Schultz, the current teacher-school board dispute may well be a taste of what students can expect next year.

Judge Schultz, a Minnesota district court judge, served as the neutral member of a three-man adjustment panel whose majority report was adopted by the school board.

The report was signed by Judge Schultz and Peter Popovich, who represented the school board. Herman Talle, representing the teachers, wrote a minority report critical of the panel's recommendations.

adjustment panel

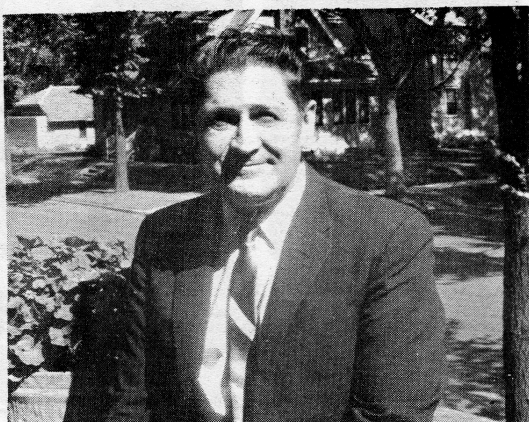
The teachers called for the panel to be set up early this year in accordance with a provision in state law.

Judge Schultz feels that "teachers may have had second thoughts and may have preferred direct negotiation later. In January 1969, it seemed like a good idea to them, but they had changed their minds by July."

He thinks the teachers objected to an uninformed third party coming into dispute. Being a judge, however, he feels that he has been adequately trained to hear and consider unfamiliar arguments fairly.

"The teachers and board cooperated. They provided me with all the data available. Of course, there may have been some that was not made available to me that I would have liked to have seen.

"The panel did this much good: It gave both sides an opportunity to present their arguments and to observe a neutral member's reaction to the arguments. I feel that



Judge Harold Schultz

person's decision merits some attention.

"My report does not favor the school board at all," he replies to teachers' charges that it does. "I am somewhat disappointed by the teachers' charges of prejudice. I personally knew not one member of the teachers or board members. I own no property in Roseville, nor do I have relatives there."

Judge Schultz

Judge Schultz explained that the problem is not merely the size of salaries. "What they're complaining about is not treating the so-called career or experienced teacher properly."

The judge believes that salary raises should not be based solely on how long a teacher has been teaching, or how many college degrees he has, but should take into account his actual educational merit. The teachers also

want a greater part in determining school policy which affects them, such as class size.

teacher withholding

On the teacher withholding of extracurricular services, the judge commented, "I don't know what good it will accomplish. I suspect it is just a means of putting additional pressure on the public. This is the only reason I can see why they would do this.

On whether or not the school board should re-open direct negotiations with the teachers, he said, "I'm never adverse to people discussing a problem, but when the school board says this would weaken the law, I agree. This would be saying, 'The panel was a waste of time and didn't know what it was talking about.' "It would make future panels meaningless."

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