

# NT teachers accept tentative contract

by Don Deutsch and Chuck Zelden

The week-long teachers' strike came to a halt when NT teachers voted to return to school after hearing the school board's final contract proposal last Friday.

In a 231-28 vote of the Teachers' Association, the teachers accepted the proposal tentatively.

Rejecting the Board's original contract proposal Sept. 29, the Teachers' Association voted to strike, beginning Oct. 1, when their extended contract expired. Teachers picketed the three NT campuses for a week, forcing school to close for 6 days.

The proposed salary schedule for 1980-81 will essentially remain the same as the 1979-80 salary schedule; however, the Board has agreed to pay 7.5 per cent of each teacher's 8 per cent TRS (Teachers Retirement System) payment. This means that each teacher's net pay will increase by 7.5 per cent, in addition to a decrease in taxes previously paid on the retirement fund. Teachers will also receive more fringe benefit money, to be used for medical and educational costs.

In the second year of the contract, teachers are guaranteed an 'across-the-board' 7.4

per cent increase and an increase in stipends. In addition, the Board will pay the remainder of each teacher's TRS payments, amounting, in total, to an approximate 10 per cent increase for the teachers. Over the two year period, the cost to the Board will be approximately 21 per cent.

Also included in the Board's "package" proposal were clauses concerning teacher transfers and longevity pay (bonuses given to retiring teachers who served in the district a number of years). The transfer clause, which had previously been eliminated from the contract,



Teachers picketing at East voice discontent. (photo by Ziv)

calls for the formation of faculty committees which will establish guidelines regarding the transfer of teachers between East and West campuses of the "new" NT.

One contract dispute that was not settled to the teachers' satisfaction was a reduction in force (RIF)

guideline which was not included in the proposal.

Although teachers returned to work last Friday for an Institute day, it may take a while for normalcy to resume.

"We've gone through too much and it's going to take time for the hurts to heal," said Supt. Bickert.

## westwatch

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Teachers picketing on Frontage road cause gaps block on Edens. (photo by Ziv)

### Teachers advocate NT excellence

by Don Deutsch

The seven day teachers' strike resulted from a breakdown of contract negotiations and the teachers' belief that the district's school board and administration had "bargained in bad faith" and jeopardized educational excellence at NT.

Anxious to settle their differences with district negotiators, teachers made frequent invitations for a final contract settlement and openly met with community members to express their side of the argument.

The faculty have said that they did not strike for more money, but for the principle that equitable percentage increments be given to all teachers. Originally, the Board proposed to give larger increases to beginning teachers, which discouraged "career teachers" from remaining at NT. However, the proposal the Board submitted on Oct. 10 called for a uniform increase, which the teachers considered a positive result of the strike.

The NT merit system was established traditionally to give incentives to faculty members to become "the very best teachers." By steps and scales, teachers climb to the top of the pay schedule through experience, and evaluation by the administration and their colleagues.

The faculty felt that the Board, in its original proposal, ignored the NT merit system. According to Donald Rogan, president of the NT High School Education Association (NTHSEA), the Board wanted the school to be "mediocre" while the teachers wanted it to be "excellent."

Tom McClain, a Drama department Chairman at East and co-chairman of the "Crisis Committee," said that the top scale on the merit system is much harder to attain than any other high school of comparison, even though NT salaries are higher than others. "A teacher must be with us for 15 years just to be on the top scale, and 19 years to reach the top of the top scale," McClain said. He also said that the Board's previous offer to "cap-off" the top scale would result in dwindling enthusiasm in teachers to continue their progress at NT. Even "the most highly principled person can

become weary and demoralized," wrote Rogan in a letter to parents.

In that letter, Rogan also said that the public focuses on the salary issue alone and that the main concern with teachers is the principles and philosophies on which NT has traditionally prided itself.

One of these principles is that the teachers have a voice in educational decisions, specifically a transfer policy and teacher cuts. The Board seemed to waive on these issues, first offering policies regarding teacher transfers between East and West and guidelines for teacher reduction, then retracting the offers. According to the teachers, this kind of retrogressive action was "bargaining in bad faith."

The Board's final proposal, which, the teachers tentatively accepted, included a transfer clause, but did not establish guidelines for teacher cuts. The teachers had asked that "reduction in force" (RIF) be proportionate to declining enrollment so that teachers could work effectively, special classes could continue, and young teachers' jobs could be protected.

The teachers also considered "bad faith bargaining" the Board's original plan to terminate longevity pay, which they subsequently added to the final contract proposal.

NT teachers voted to continue the strike after a negotiation session on Oct. 3, at which the Board offered to increase their salary offer from 6.38 to 6.51 per cent (\$10,000 overall), while the teachers lowered their request by \$100,000. The Board's offer only amounted to an "insulting" \$70.00 per teacher, according to McClain.

Despite a court injunction issued Oct. 7, which ordered teachers to return to work, a majority of teachers continued to strike, acknowledging the possibility that they may be fired, fined or jailed.

Although the strike apparently was effective in settling contract disputes, the teachers did not feel good about striking. As they noted in a letter to parents, "To be on strike is repugnant and personally devastating to every NT teacher who now finds himself unable to continue his work in the school and maintain his personal integrity as a professional."

### School board considers teachers' strike harmful

by Chuck Zelden

Throughout the contract dispute which culminated in a tentative settlement last Friday, the New Trier Board of Education viewed the teachers' demands for a contract too excessive and their strike illegal.

In dealing with the money issue, "the Board wanted to give more money to those teachers at the bottom of the scale because "the best of our teachers' salaries have peaked out at the top," explained Tom Timmis, director of personnel. According to the revised proposal, however, all teachers will receive a uniform increase, a concession the Board made in its most recent negotiations.

Although the Board revised their salary offer in hopes to end the strike, they remained firm on their position regarding teacher cuts. The teachers wanted cuts to be in proportion to the number of students decreasing. The Board views this as impossible. As Mr. Timmis said, "there can be no RIF (Reduction in Force) agreement. . . for the board must retain the right to decrease staff past decreasing enrollment. . . for financial needs."

Although the teachers offered to go into binding arbitration to settle contract differences, the Board of Education felt that it could not and would not do this. The reason for this, according to Timmis, is that "the Board is elected by the constituency of NT Township high schools to run the schools, and they are not going to submit the negotiations of a salary settlement to a third party."

Aside from feeling that the teachers' strike was "illegal," the Board also holds that it caused disruptions that can be and are harmful. The greatest harm in the Board's view is the harm done to students. As Superintendent Bickert said, "The strike has been disruptive to students, and it is important for students to be back in school — especially at this time (early in the year)."

Another disruption in the Board's view, is that "the teachers strike has hurt the implementation of the 1-3 plan," Dr. Bickert said. This has put them behind their "time line" and one reason is that the teachers are not there to help.

In order to end the strike, the Board has taken a number of actions, the first of which was to close the schools during the first 6 days of the strike. On October 7 the Board went to court to ask for an injunction to order the teachers back to school. After hearing both sides, Judge Arnold Green ruled in favor of the Board of Education and issued an injunction ordering the teachers back to work. On Oct. 8, however, a majority of teachers continued to walk the picket lines in defiance of the injunction. The Board's next move on Oct. 9 was to have freshman come to school to be taught by non-striking teachers, substitutes, and certified administrators.

When the Board learned last Friday that the teachers accepted the contract proposal and agreed to return to work, they made Friday an Institute Day which would allow sports competition to resume that weekend.

One view held by both sides throughout the strike was, as Dr. Cox said, "It's tragic that this strike had to happen."

## editorial

### Teachers uphold their 'higher' laws

As Henry David Thoreau did in "Civil Disobedience," NT teachers took the law in their own hands. Thoreau spent on night in jail for not paying his taxes, and NT-teachers defied a court order to return to school. In school, students are taught that when a law is unjust, it should be broken. Though many members of the Board and community felt that teachers were setting a bad example for students by going against the law, they were in fact adhering to the principles they teach their students. Since the court order to return to school was submitted by a Board who acted unjustly toward teachers, the NT teachers felt it was wrong to obey an unfair law.

The Board has let down the teachers and acted unfairly in many ways. The action of the Board has been termed "retrogressive bargaining," which means that the Board has retracted its word on previous agreements with no regard for the teachers. This course of action is also called "bad faith bargaining."

The Board started this "retrogressive bargaining" by offering to NT teachers a "package" proposal. Conspicuously absent from this proposal is the matter of RIF (reduction in force). Originally the ratio of teachers being dismissed was to be directly proportionate to the decline in enrollment, but according to the new contract proposals the Board has complete control over the hiring and the firing of NT teachers with no concession to declining enrollment. This is unfair to the teachers, who may be fired at the whim of the Board, and unfair to students who may suffer from increased class size and fewer special programs.

Another stipulation of the new agreement is that the "Transfer Clause" be eliminated. The previous rationale was that the selection of teachers and positions at the "new" NT would be based on seniority and volunteers. But the Board decided that it didn't want to be bound to this agreement and denied teachers the right to an equitable transfer policy.

The Board dealt another unfair blow to the teachers in its treatment of the merit system. This system regulates the amount each teacher is paid per year. Under this system, a teacher who has been at NT for 19 years and has proven to be a superior educator will be at the top of the pay scale. In essence, the higher paid teacher is one who has had the most teaching experience (years) at NT and who has, as a result of many evaluations, demonstrated his merit. But the Board is disregarding this system by



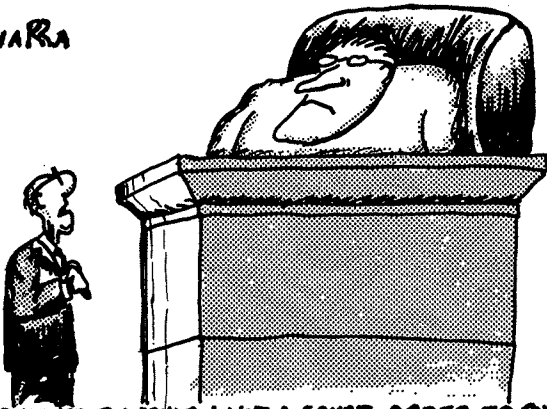
offering teachers at the bottom of the pay scale a higher percentage salary increase, than teachers on higher scales. The teachers want a uniform increase to avoid discrimination by offering dedicated teachers less, and they believe that the motivation to progress will decline.

The final insult came to the teachers when the Board, after hours of negotiations, increased their salary offer by only \$10,000 while the teachers were willing to come down \$100,000. This proposal was so outrageous that the teachers would not even consider it. The Board is composed of businessmen who are concerned with the fiscal aspect of the strike. The offer they made was designed to fit in the previously compiled budget. It appears that the Board is not concerned with the best interests of the teachers or the school, but only with how salary increases would affect the fiscal community.

Perhaps a settlement could have been reached and a strike averted if negotiations were given more time and treated more fairly. From the start, teachers were ready to negotiate with the Board, but negotiations could not begin. Mr. Claus, attorney for the Board, and Mr. Wesley Jennings, federal mediator, were both out of town. No explanation for either absence was ever given, and negotiations had to be postponed until their return. When negotiations finally did begin, Mr. Claus was present, but the attorney for the teachers, Mr. Laurie Weiner was not allowed to attend. Thus, the teachers were unable to be represented fully and fairly.

Despite the many complications, the strike was resolved to the satisfaction of both the teachers and the Board. If the Board had dealt fairly with the teachers, not only could the strike have been shortened, but no legal action at all would have been necessary.

SEIARRA



YOUR HONOR, I WOULD LIKE A COURT ORDER TO PUT STRIKING NT TEACHERS INTO SLAVERY.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I would just like to commend the outstanding spirit and energy shown by NT students during the past few weeks.

One example is the cast, board and crew of Potpourri who have

diligently rehearsed for the show.

Football and soccer teams practicing in backyards and various organizations having meetings at their houses just goes to show that no matter what a mess the school system is in, NT students are no. 1.

Anonymous

## westwatch

Dedicated to student expression by the students of New Trier West High School, 7 Happ Road, Northfield, Illinois 60063.

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Dear Editor,

I have been an avid reader of WESTWATCH for the past four years, but there are a couple of things in your publication that still puzzle me. First, I do not understand why you fail to allot the sports editor more pages to give the reader a more comprehensive view of the NT-W sports scene. For example, in your first issue sports was only given two pages and thus was not able to cover even half of the fall sports. A third sports page could have been given to insure complete coverage, but instead you elected to include a full-page ad. After all, isn't this a

service to the school and not a money making proposition?

The second item in the paper that has bothered me over the years is your policy to bury the sports editor's name in your page two listing of editors. Since he has the third most important job on the paper, why not list him there so he can receive the recognition he deserves.

I sincerely hope something can be done concerning these two issues I have brought to your attention.

Larry Freed  
 former NT-W student