

# Chudleigh still hopeful

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

The threat of a teachers' strike still looms but Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh is hopeful deals can be worked out.

"I think there is a reluctance by teachers to go on strike," he said. "I continue to maintain my faith in teachers. There's a difference between union leaders and the average teacher."

Halton teachers, represented by several bargaining agents, could be on strike this week if current negotiations fail. However, negotiations with elementary school teachers are not expected to be as contentious as with high school teachers.

It appears public high school teachers will negotiate with one or two boards in Ontario and then try to make any settlement portable across the province.

Mr. Chudleigh called the plan "responsible" however he thought union representatives might simply try to pick on the weakest school board in the province from which to extract concessions.

High school teachers are unhappy with provincial requirements that they increase their classroom teaching time from an average of 18.5 hours per week to just under 21 hours per week.

Teachers' representatives have said other working conditions are also at issue, including support for extra-curricular activities. Elementary school teachers already meet standards set by the province regarding hours spent in the classroom.

All collective agreements were struck down with the passage of Bill 160. Renegotiations have been left with local school boards. Teachers claim the boards are hamstrung by provincial funding, which was set with the higher number of hours in the classroom taken into consideration.

Mr. Chudleigh agreed local school boards do not have much flexibility. He said he hopes negotiations will lead to consideration of a new timetable for high schools that would be structured with the classroom requirements in mind.

Currently Halton high schools operate with five 76-minute periods each day. Given that system, teachers would have to teach four of five periods each day in one semester and then three periods of five in the other semester, in order to match the average classroom requirements.

The classroom time requirements are based on an average of the teaching norms in the other nine Canadian provinces, Mr. Chudleigh said. Before the changes teachers usually taught three classes a semester, he added.

Mr. Chudleigh stressed that classroom teaching requirements are averages across the school board, much the same as the 22 students in a class target is an average. He said the provincial government is interested to see how local school boards implement these averages.

"This is a work in progress," he said. "There will be classrooms above and below the averages."

Mr. Chudleigh would not speculate on any actions the provincial government might take should a strike come to pass. He said providing day care dollars, as the province did during last year's illegal strike, has not been ruled out. He did commit to offering lessons on the internet or through his constituency office.

He said he understands that if the school schedules don't change, a teacher working four classes per day will be under pressure regarding any involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Mr. Chudleigh praised Halton school boards, adding there are other boards in the province which are not doing a great job.

## Breakthroughs in negotiations

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voted 90 per cent in favour of a strike earlier this summer.

The situation appeared more hopeful for the public elementary teachers.

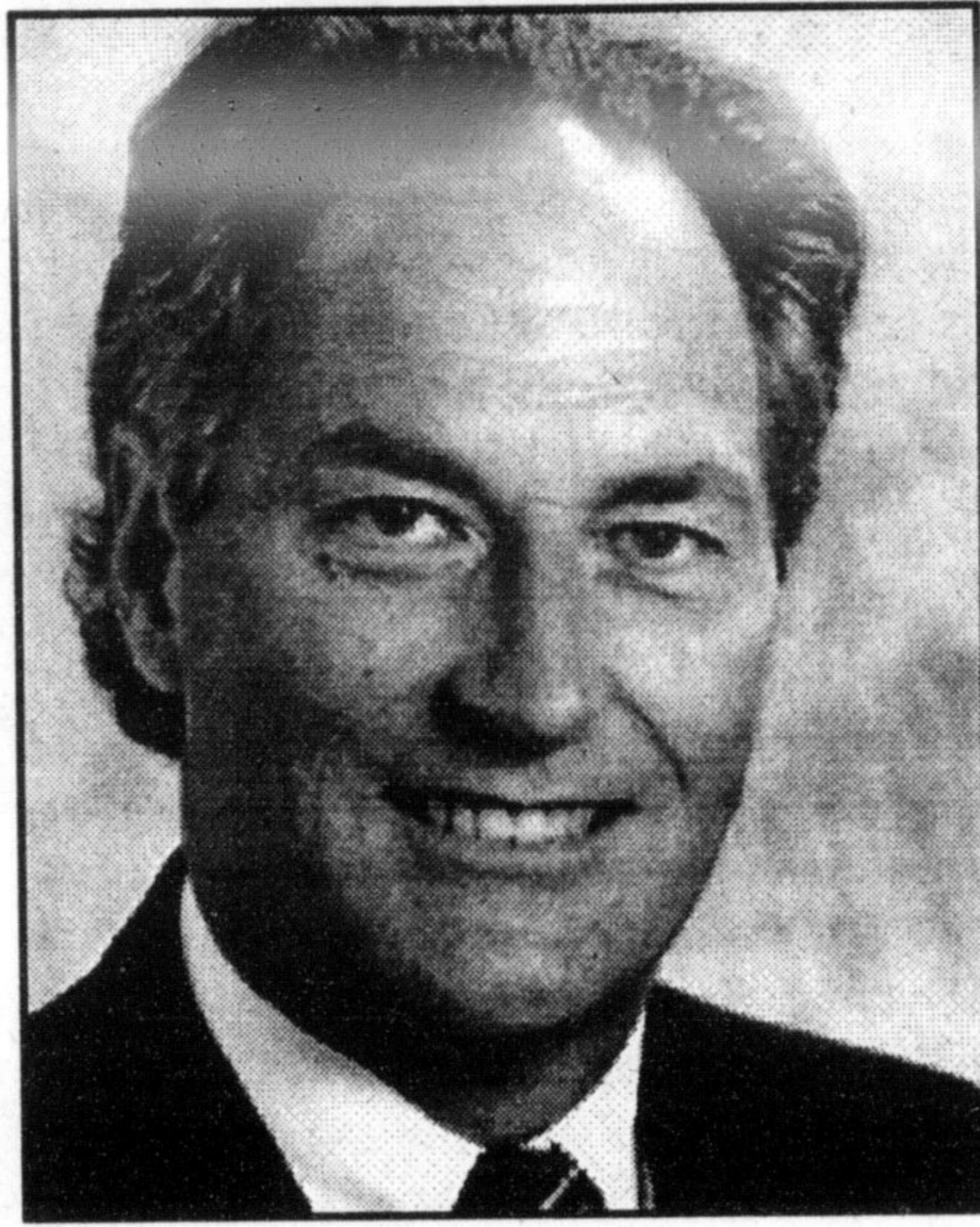
"Breakthroughs have been made in negotiations," Kathy Clarke, president of the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, Halton District, said in a statement. "We meet with the board again on September 10. Elementary teachers will be back in class Tuesday."

Mr. Tanner said the secondary school teachers' union will give advance notice if any job action is planned. He who would not specify how much warning would be given.

In an earlier interview, Mr. Tanner said teachers are also concerned about contract rights, benefits, working conditions and salaries.

"We've made some significant advances," said Mr. Tanner in an earlier interview. "But there are several significant issues outstanding. Some of them are board driven and some of them are provincially driven."

He believes both sides are anxious to resume negotiation meetings. "I'm hopeful we can eventually settle this."



Ted Chudleigh

## RC board unsure of teachers' next move

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sion of extracurricular activities to a full withdrawal of all services and Mr. Pece said the teachers will decide what action to undertake, depending on the conditions imposed by the school board.

Because the teachers are without a contract, the school board has the legal right to arbitrarily change working terms and conditions.

"I am awaiting the school board's notification as to what the terms and conditions of employment will be," he said.

But Jim Sherlock, chair of the board, said the decision as to what will happen today really lies with the teachers.

"The board is going to comply with the law and do whatever we can within the confines of the new provincial funding model and the teachers will have to make their decisions from there," he said. "The ball is not in our court."

Mr. Sherlock added that he expects schools to be open and teachers to be in their classrooms today, when students return from summer holidays.

"The board definitely is not anticipating a full withdrawal of services," he said. "We fully anticipate our teachers will be there."

The teachers voted 93 per cent in favor of strike action in June and have been in a legal strike position since August 27.

The main stumbling block in negotiations appears to be the requirement under Bill 160, that teachers' workloads be increased. Currently high school teachers instruct six of eight classes, but the new funding formula says they must teach seven out of eight.

Mr. Sherlock said individual boards have no power to ignore that provincial demand.

"The new funding formula gives us very, very little flexibility, as far as negotiations are concerned," he said.

He also said that, despite impressions to the contrary, the board is not flush with cash.

"That simply is not the case," said Mr. Sherlock. "It is an unfortunate assumption on the part of many of the people we're dealing with that we're loaded with money and we're not."

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