

Teachers hit streets to get their message out

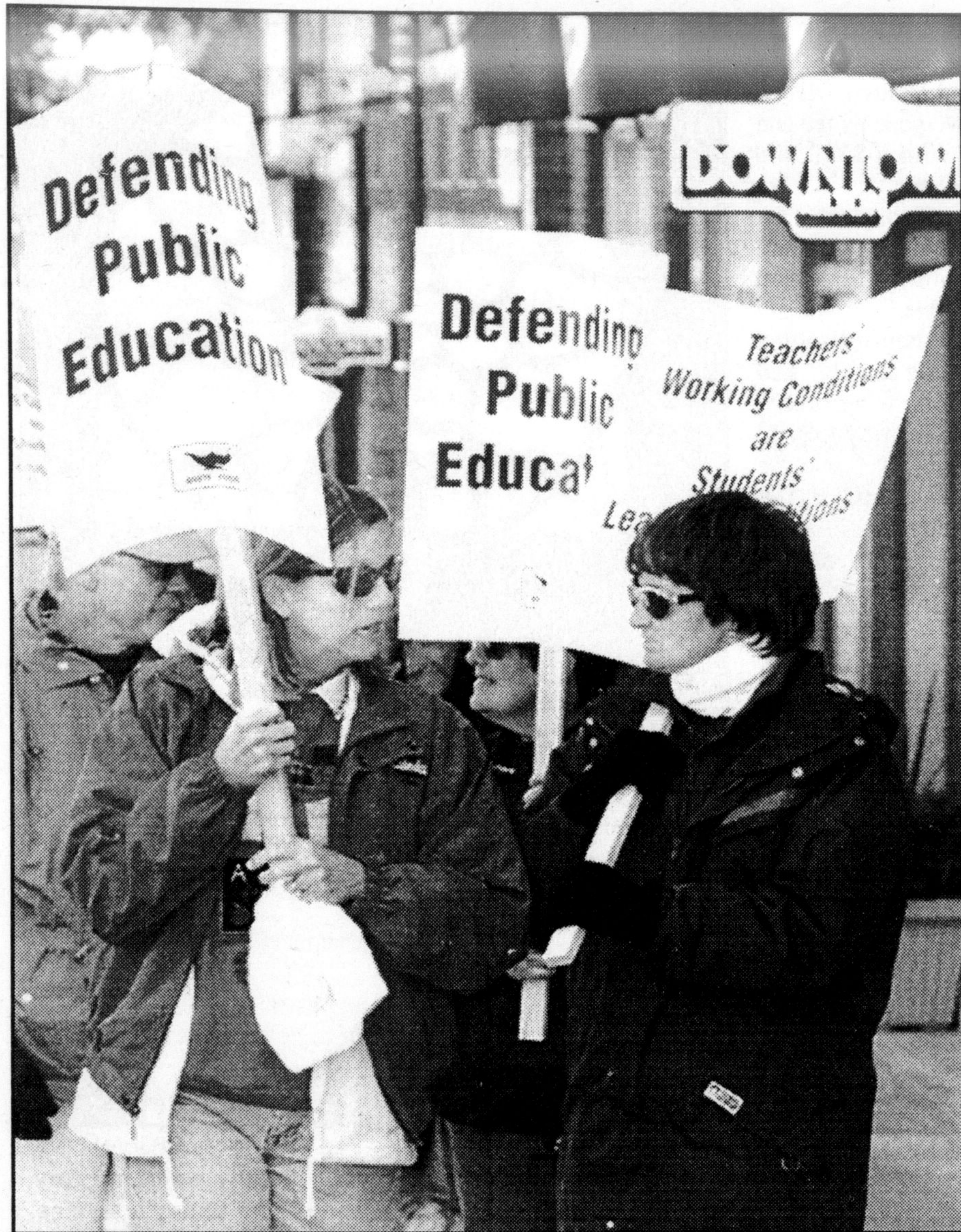


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Public board high school teachers picketed outside area MPP Ted Chudleigh's downtown Milton office Thursday afternoon.

By STEVE LeBLANC

The Champion

Class size — not class time — is the real issue surrounding public high school labour disputes.

That is in Halton Region at least, according to local public board teachers who upped the ante in their ongoing talks with trustees yesterday through a one-day walkout.

Approximately 15,000 students at 17 Halton District School Board schools missed classes while instructors picketed their individual schools in the morning and moved on to area MPPs' offices in the afternoon.

Will do the time

Teachers also distributed flyers throughout the region, which state they have in fact accepted the extra 25 minutes a day of instructional time laid down by the provincial government.

What they say they are opposed to is the increase in class size — which they contend stems from a paring back of teachers across the region at a time when enrolment has gone up.

"The government says the average class size is supposed to be 22 (students per teacher) but we've found most schools in Halton have plenty of classes with over 30," said Bob Neshevich, union branch president for Milton District High School. Union flyers suggest more than 553 public high school classes in Halton have 30-plus students, including 60 in Milton.

"Through their ad campaign, the government has created a false impression about what the teachers' objections really are."

Mr. Neshevich said he can't understand how the Tories can find millions of dollars for television commercials about the ongoing labour disputes and then suggest there's no more money for education.

Credit where due

He added, "I have to give them credit, the ads are very slick. But the fact is they're just wrong."

Mr. Neshevich — who was optimistic that the one-

day walkout would put pressure on the board and speed up negotiations — also relayed his frustration over a lack of school sports and other extra-curricular activities that have gone along with education changes.

One of his fellow MD instructors, Norman Busse, said not only have after-school programs been curtailed but class field trips as well.

"Our supply budget has not increased so we don't have the money to hire on-call instructors to substitute for teachers on field trips," he said.

Added Mr. Neshevich, "You think about all the things that help round out students' education. A lot of them aren't going on because of these changes."

E.C. Drury union branch president Steve Gayfer said yesterday's walkout should act as a wake-up call to the board, whose members he feels have been inflexible during negotiations, which are set to resume next week.

No carte blanche

"I think after last year there was a perception that teachers wouldn't strike again," remarked Mr. Gayfer. "I think school boards feel they can do whatever they want and that's simply not the case."

He said the teachers aren't opposed to the extra instructional time so much as the way in which it was implemented.

"There's a zillion ways for this to work without making us teach seven out of eight classes a year. We could use teacher advisory groups or simply lengthen the periods," Mr. Gayfer explained. "In Hamilton, the board has agreed on a six out of eight settlement. I don't see why Halton, a board so close, can't do the same."

"As it stands, the government is asking us to do more work, spend less time with each kid and volunteer for extra-curricular activities on top of it all."

"It's way too much."

Mr. Neshevich said he didn't anticipate any more one-day walkouts, stating that "we'll either have a settlement or a full-fledged strike."

Keep Cozy this winter!

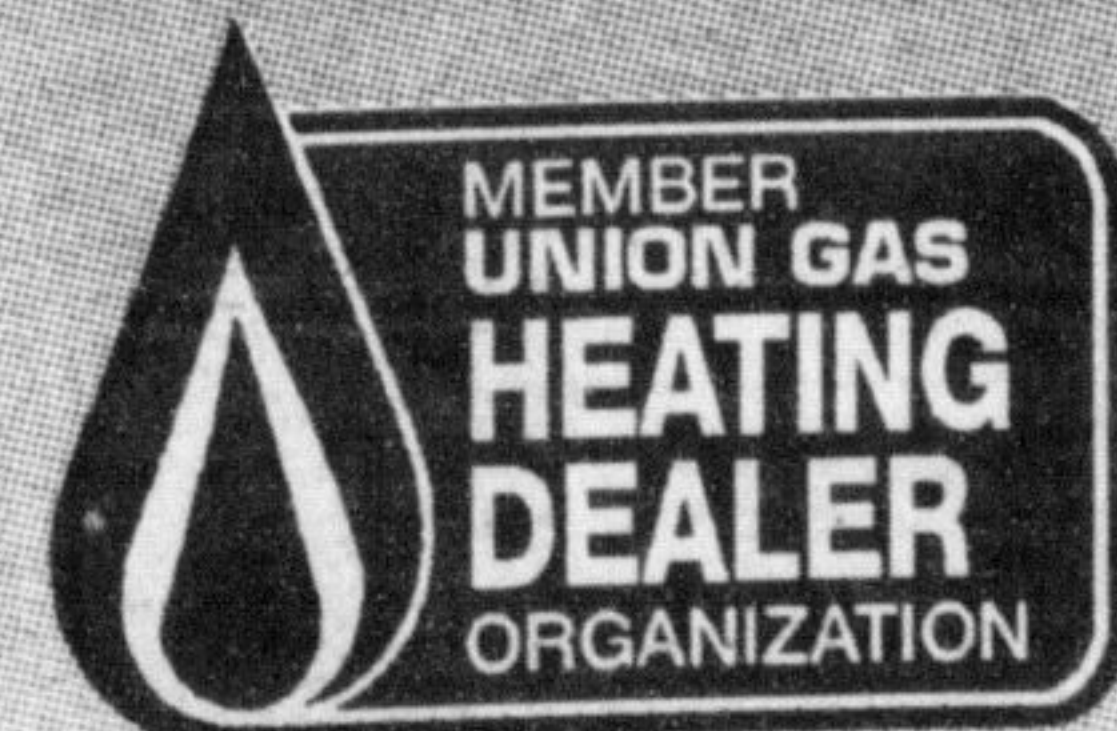


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