

Students flee school strife

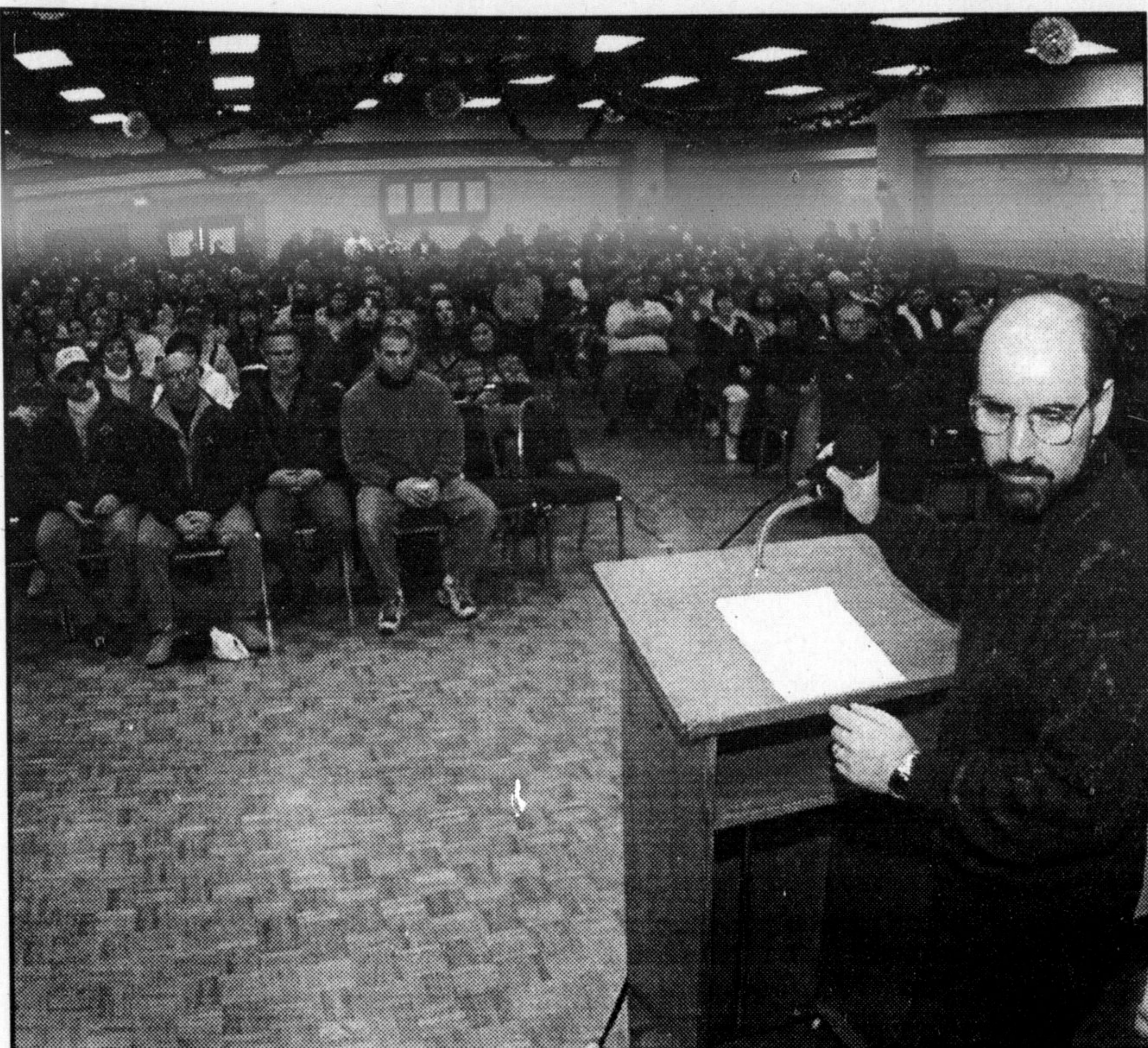


Photo by RON KUZYSK

Union head Joe Pece addresses Halton Catholic teachers after the lockout.

Negotiations go on under a blackout

By **TIM WHITNELL**
Special to The Champion

A media blackout has been imposed as the two sides in the Halton Catholic District School Board labour dispute resumed negotiations.

Talks involving the union representatives for the region's 365 high school teachers and the school board continued face-to-face Thursday morning, just one day after the board locked out its instructors and gave 6,300 Catholic students an unscheduled and indefinite holiday.

Members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the board's negotiating team met with a newly-appointed mediator for four hours Wednesday night and again Thursday. Deputy Minister of Labour Tony Dean was also present.

School board trustees had voted unanimously Monday to lock teachers out. The resolution came soon after teachers voted 99.4 per cent to reject the board's latest contract offer, one that included one per cent pay raises in September 1999,

February 2000 and February 2001.

Subsequently, board Chair Jim Sherlock informed the teachers' union that it had until 4:30 p.m. Tuesday to "lift all partial sanctions" for the second semester — namely, refusing to engage in extra-curricular activities like offering after-school academic counselling or supervising student clubs or sports teams — or teachers would be locked out.

While the two sides met once again Thursday morning, teachers were out in front of the board offices with picket signs beginning late Wednesday morning.

Earlier that day, Halton's locked out Catholic high school teachers met in Burlington to be briefed by their local president, Joe Pece, and their provincial union president, Marshall Jarvis.

Teachers were told they will receive \$50 per day in lockout pay and that the union has arranged for all of their benefits to be covered, if the board doesn't do so. Pensions will also be topped up during the labour strife.

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Registration will start Monday for a large group of Catholic students planning mid-year transfers to Halton's public high schools.

"We've already had more than 100 students looking to register in our schools and only half of the principals' reports are in," Dusty Papke told Halton District School Board trustees Wednesday.

The education director said the Monday registrations will allow preparation time and a chance to monitor progress of Catholic board labour talks.

The Halton Catholic District School Board and secondary teachers have scheduled mediation talks through the weekend. The Catholic board locked out the teachers Wednesday, closing

its high schools to students.

The province requires open access to high schools, Mr. Papke told Wednesday's committee of the whole meeting.

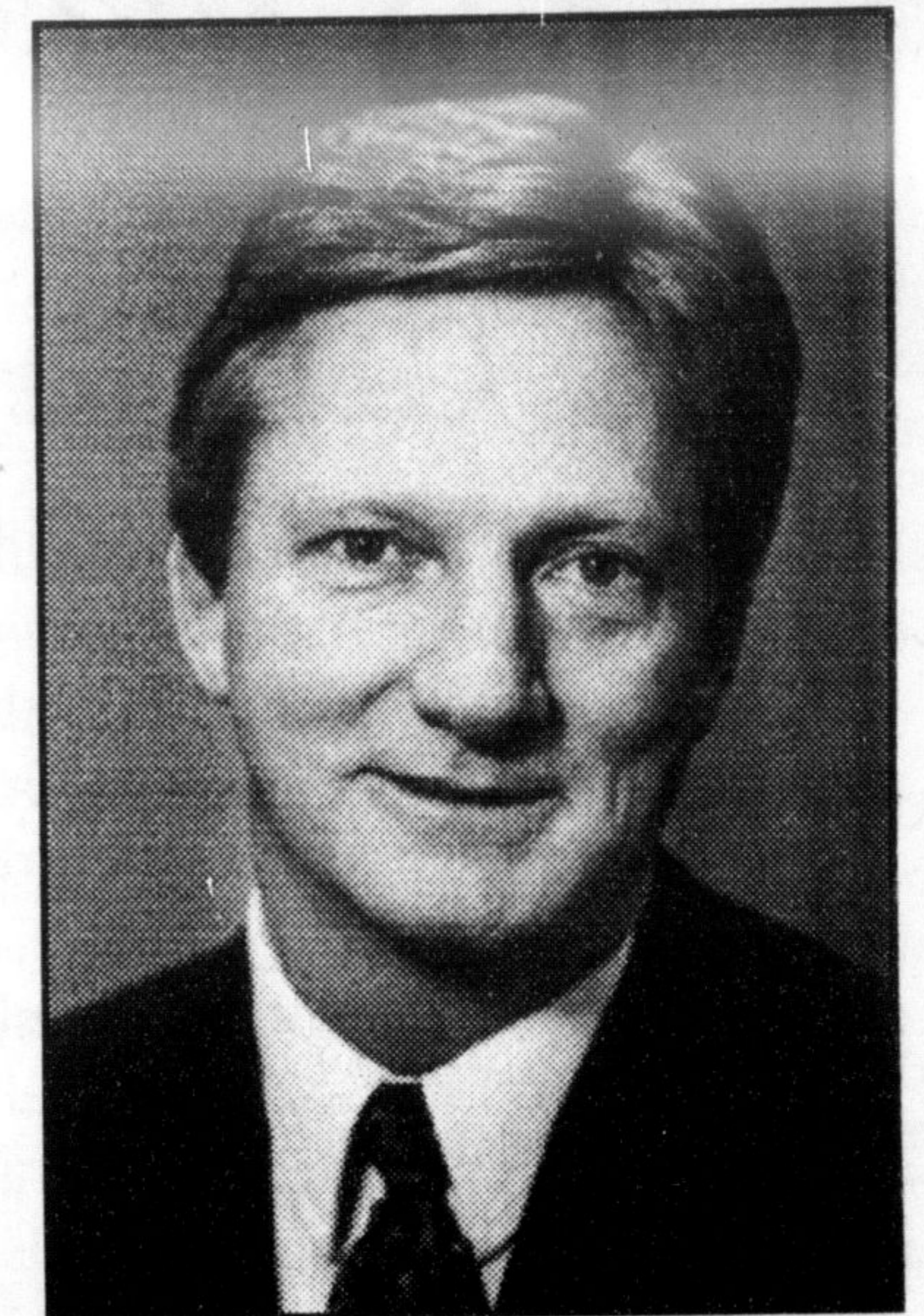
Will hire

"We're required to accept all students and they're going to have a significant impact on us with the transfers," he noted.

Mr. Papke believes some students intend to transfer permanently to the public board.

Prior to the lockout, Catholic high school students had gone without extracurricular activities since the school year started.

"The bottom line is we will have to hire teachers," said Mr. Papke. "We're trying to avoid changing existing classes."



Dusty Papke

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