

New teacher sanctions now in effect for public board

BY TIM WHITNELL
Special to The Champion

Halton Region's public high school teachers have ramped up their job action making it more difficult for the school board to replace absent instructors.

The decision by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, District 20, to no longer have its members cover classes or other assigned duties for absent colleagues was one of five new work-to-rule sanctions announced Wednesday. They went into effect Friday.

Halton's 750 full-time equivalent public high school teachers have been without a contract since August 31. They gave their union a strike mandate in mid-February and had been employing a low-level job action since then.

About 300 people, mostly teachers, rallied in the cold near the Halton board administrative offices in Burlington late Wednesday afternoon. They heard anti-Ernie Eves/Mike Harris speeches from several area Liberal and NDP candidates and also learned of their new job action strategies.

"The main reason we are here is there is a crisis in education. John Snobelen (former education minister) promised a crisis and today

we're still living it," said OSSTF District 20 president Joe Harwood.

Mr. Harwood told the crowd that in addition to not performing on-call duties, the second phase of sanctions against the board includes four other tactics:

- Members won't apply for any upcoming summer or night school positions for the 2003-04 school year;

- Members won't distribute any board materials that aren't directly related to classroom instruction;

- Members won't participate in fundraising for any curricular (classroom) supplies, materials and equipment for their school or the board;

- Student absences will be reported to the principal or vice-principal, not to the automated telephone system.

Mr. Harwood stressed though that classroom instruction and student evaluation will continue, as will the supervision of extra-curricular activities. Teachers will still participate in upcoming parent/teacher interview nights.

"We hope that the (new) sanctions will encourage the board to come to the bargaining table and negotiate a fair agreement," said Mr. Harwood.

"Teachers' incomes have fallen behind the cost of living by almost seven per cent since the Tories took office (in 1995)."

The union president and his counterpart at the Halton board, executive officer of human resources Dawn Beckett-Morton, confirmed that the two sides are scheduled to meet April 17. They haven't negotiated since February 13. Ms Beckett-Morton expressed regret with the new sanctions, particularly with the lack of fill-ins for absent teachers by other teachers at the affected school.

"It'll be an inconvenience for us. The immediate reaction is the withdrawal of the on-calls, that's the one we're most concerned about right now. The dilemma is you're not sure when you can get an occasional teacher, and there's the cost factor as well."

The general practice, said Ms Beckett-Morton, is that the first two absences at a school are filled internally by staff. That won't happen now as the board will have to look to its complement of approximately 300 supply teachers to fill all such voids.

Ms Beckett-Morton said under normal circumstances many occasional teachers aren't available at any one time for a variety of reasons including that many also supply for neighbouring boards.

Competition for supply teachers will be exacerbated in Halton, she said, if the Peel and Hamilton boards are also hit with on-call teacher sanctions.

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