

Guest column

Three strategies to stop teachers' strikes

By JOSEPH V. ORAVITZ

Students in Pennsylvania's 501 public schools are beginning a new year of classes. However, for several thousand students there looms the threat of an unwanted, extended vacation because their teachers may walk out if contract demands are not met.

Unfortunately, these strikes are not uncommon in Pennsylvania. We lead the nation in the number of walkouts in our public schools and have gained the title of "School Strike Capital" of the nation.

This regrettable history has affected virtually every community, touching the lives of millions of students, including over \$53,000 in 1993-94 alone.

For more than 20 years, these strikes continued, unabated. For more than 20 years, the Pennsylvania General Assembly steadfastly avoided taking any action to restrain teacher unions from closing schools at will. For more than 20 years, not one school strike bill ever was reported from a committee in either the state House or Senate, let alone voted on by either chamber.

All that changed two years ago, when the General Assembly passed Act 88 of 1992. This law is significant for several reasons, but most notably because it represented the first restriction on public school employees' right-to-strike in nearly a generation.

Act 88 bans selective strikes, requires advance public notice of strikes, establishes a mandatory timetable for bargaining, enacts new impasse resolution procedures and, perhaps most importantly, ensures that no strike will preclude a child from receiving the minimum 180 days of instruction to which she or he is entitled by law.

Already, Act 88 has had a sig-

nificant impact. After just two years, the law has helped to cut the number of strikes in the state by half, generally produced settlements more quickly and reduced average salary increases by almost 25%.

However, as encouraging as these statistics may be, there remains genuine cause for concern. The number of strikes may have been dramatically reduced, but 16 walkouts (in 1993-94) is still too many.

The unavoidable truth is that in public schools alone, employees are able to strike and generally recover lost wages due to the rescheduling of classes afterwards. No other persons enjoy the same advantage. The requirement to revise school calendars in order to provide the mandated 180 days of school effectively creates an incentive to strike, since teachers know that days spent on a picket line early in the school year likely will be made up later on.

There are three options to deal with this problem. The first is to permit school districts not to reschedule classes following a strike, thereby removing any assurance that days on strike (and lost wages) will be recouped. While that may enhance the school boards' bargaining position, it also has the effect of punishing the students, by precluding them from receiving instruction to which they are entitled.

The second option is to ban school strikes altogether. However, any proposal to repeal the right-to-strike will inevitably lead to the potential for enactment of binding arbitration as the ultimate means of resolving bargaining impasses.

PSBA views arbitration as a cure worse than the disease. It

effectively undermines representative government, by turning over to persons who are unaccountable to the community the authority to establish salaries, benefits and working conditions that drive local budgets. School boards would be left to do little more than raise the taxes to pay for settlements awarded by arbitrators. And costs likely would soar. (In Connecticut, arbitrators sided with the teacher unions more than 75% of the time over a ten year period.)

The third alternative is, in our opinion, the next logical step. PSBA supports imposing a financial assessment on teachers for each day a strike disrupts the regular school calendar. The amount withheld should be twice the daily rate of pay for each day on strike, as it is done in New York state. That way, even when strike days are made up, teachers will still lose one day of pay for each day they strike — as do others who decide to withhold their services.

For those who contend that this proposal is one-sided and unfair, we suggest that such isolation also contain an equal assessment against state aid received by the school district. This removes even the appearance that districts would stand to benefit financially by not settling a contract dispute.

PSBA believes such a proposal would encourage the negotiating parties to reach agreement and virtually eliminate all school strikes. That would be in everyone's best interest.

Joseph V. Oravitz is executive director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, a nonprofit organization representing the interests of, and providing services to, the state's 501 school districts.

Maternal and Family Health to hold benefit golf tournament

The second annual Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS) golf tournament will be held September 16 at Shadowbrook Resort with a shotgun start at 11 a.m.

The format is captain and crew. A hole-in-one, at the tournament could win a trip for two to Orlando, Florida donated by Tenenbaum's Travel.

Other prizes include closest to the pin and longest drive for both men and women players.

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Library news

Book Club's first meeting of season September 19

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Book Club of the Back Mountain Memorial Library will hold its first meeting of the new season on Monday, Sept. 19, at 1:30 in the reference room of the library.

The Book Club has received \$1,885 in membership dues to date, which money has been used to purchase books for the Book Club shelf in the library. These books circulate to book club members only for the first six months after purchase. Interested members are invited to join the book club; \$10 for a single membership and \$15 for a double. The program will be a book review and some show and tell items from members. Guests are welcome to attend.

Tuesday, Sept. 27 will be Amnesty Day at the library. All books returned between 9:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. will be received with no overdue fines charged. We would hope that some long overdue books will be returned; either in the bookdrop or at the front desk.

The library is currently showing the Wyoming Valley Youth Salute pictures in the library. The program is sponsored by the National Council on Youth Leadership. The library has 28 select student pictures from Dallas and Lake-Lehman High Schools. Two of the students shown have previously worked at the Back Mountain Memorial Library. The pictures will be here until September 16.

SEPTEMBER SPECTACULAR reminder. Saturday, the 24th beginning at 11 a.m. until all items are sold. Auction in the antique room on the library grounds, cash sales only. Sale space available at \$12 a table with check at library for reservation. Book Sales in the library basement. Food vendors on the grounds. This is the final wrap up for auction 1994.

New books at the library: "A Son of the Circus" by John Irving is a novel of Dr. Farrok Daruwalla, a 59-year-old orthopedic surgeon and a Canadian citizen who lives in Toronto. He returns to Bombay periodically where most of his patients are crippled children.

"Nothing Lasts Forever" by Sidney Sheldon takes the reader into the frenetic world of a big San Francisco hospital...where events catapult three women doctors into a white-hot spotlight. The story races from the life-and-death decisions to the fireworks of a murder trial.

"Daughter of the Stars" by Phyllis Whitney is a spellbinding tale of a young woman's search for her family and for the truth about her father's disappearance. Lacey Elliott seems to have everything, but there has always been a great deal missing from her life.

"Until You" by Judith McNaught is a glorious new romance, sweeping from the wilds of America to the elegant ballrooms of 1820's London, in which a beautiful, spirited girl embarks on a marvelous adventure. The life before her seems full of wondrous possibilities.

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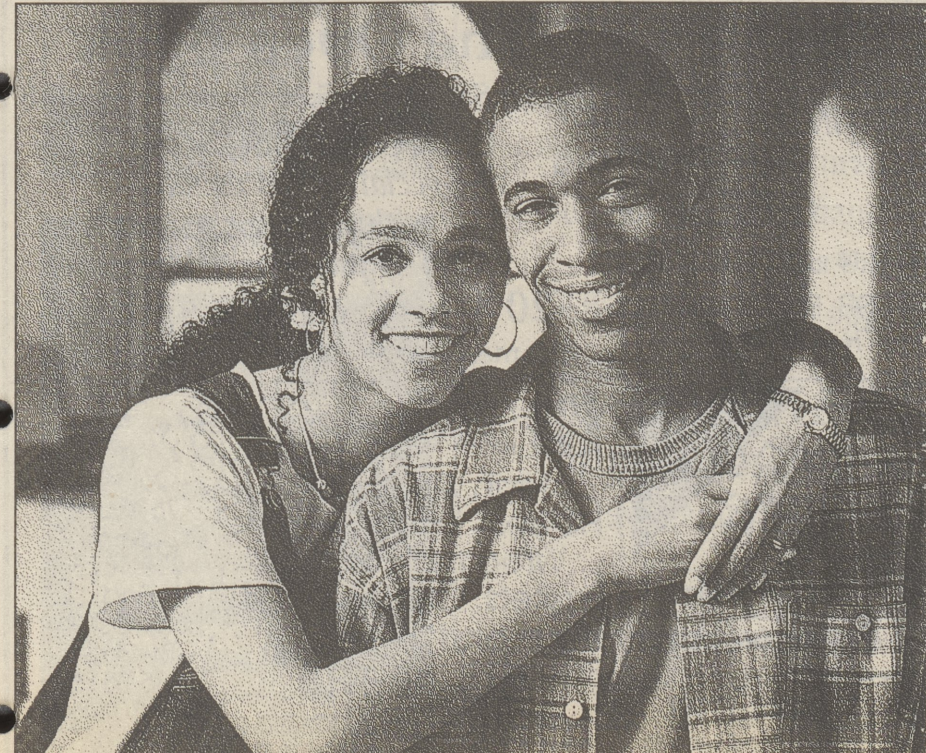
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