

# The Federal Way Teachers Strike of 1974

By Chris Green



Historical  
Society  
of  
Federal Way

Historical Society of Federal Way

November 24, 2013

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## Introduction

From August 29 until September 17, 1974, Federal Way Washington, then an unincorporated part of King County, was wracked by its first ever K-12 teachers strike. After the strike ended, two of the five members of the Federal Way School Board, Richard Schoon and board president Rol Malan, gave their impressions of the striking teachers in a letter to the

*Federal Way News:*

It is disgusting to see people who teach our children overtly violate and disregard the law, use the foulest of obscenities in front of the children they teach, destroy personal property, harass [strike-breaking substitute] teachers and citizens ... and finally...resort to extortion to achieve their ends.<sup>1</sup>

The indignant sentiments of Schoon and Malan came after the school board and the teachers reached a strike settlement that a majority of the school board members claimed was achieved by extortion on the part of the teachers union. According to Malan and Schoon's account, this settlement, allegedly achieved by the threat of teacher violence against the school district, was the culmination of a 20 day strike in which teachers on picket lines behaved in uncivilized, even criminal fashion. There was no hard evidence to prove the accusations of extortion. However, these accusations became the most notable feature of the strike.

The Federal Way teachers strike of 1974 was notable for teacher's use of extremely aggressive tactics to achieve their goals of having a substantial voice in the conduct of their classrooms and achieving greater financial security. The teachers believed that the majority of school board members were determined to avoid ceding any of the absolute decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> Rol Malan & Richard Schoon, "News Readers Speak Out: Board Officials Relate Negotiation Problems," *Federal Way News*, September 25 1974. Sec 1, 1.

power in the district's operation exercised by the board. The different (and occasionally legally questionable tactics) used by teachers were seized upon by the school board and their supporters to try to discredit the teachers and perhaps cloud the issues which caused the strike. This paper will discuss events prior to the strike, the strike itself and its aftermath.

In its coverage of these topics, this paper will rely extensively on newspaper coverage, mostly from the weekly *Federal Way News*, then the community's only newspaper. It will also rely on primary source documents: Federal Way school board minutes from the period, documents produced by the teachers union, the Federal Way Education Association (the FWEA) and reminiscences from several striking teachers. This paper should in no way be construed as a definitive account but merely a first edition with revisions possibly to come later.

Documentation for certain aspects of the strike has been hard to come by and I would welcome enlightenment on certain aspects for a possible future edition.

## **Chapter one: Before the Strike: Teacher Power Rising**

The 1974 Federal Way teacher strike took place within the context of a growing enthusiasm among teachers, in Washington State and nationwide, for the use of the strike weapon to achieve collective bargaining aims. Among K-12 teachers.-as with all public sector workers in the United States,-strikes had been relatively rare until the 1960's. The federal government did not legalize collective bargaining for federal government workers until President John F Kennedy issued an executive order in January 1962. Kennedy's order seemingly helped spur the efforts to legalize collective bargaining among state and local government workers. In Federal Way, teachers channeled their increasing militancy through the Federal Way Education Association (FWEA). In the early 1970's, the FWEA grew more aggressive in attempting to achieve its aims, while at the same time the school board expressed strong opposition to many of the teachers' key demands.

### *Teachers Union Militancy Rises in Washington State*

At the time of the 1974 strike, the FWEA was (as it is currently) affiliated at the national level with the National Education Association (NEA). Previously the strongest teachers' organization in the United States, the NEA in the 1960's faced, in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), an increasingly powerful rival for the loyalties of the nation's teachers. The fear of losing members to the AFT played a significant role in spurring the NEA to significantly re-orient its ideology and practices. Like the NEA, the AFT presented itself as devoted to advancing the professional standards of teaching; however, unlike the NEA the AFT offered itself as a collective bargaining union for teachers. Prior to the 1960's, the NEA firmly rejected collective

bargaining as beneath the professional dignity of teachers--though local NEA affiliates sometimes did strike as well as present salary requests to school boards and successfully lobby state legislatures for legislation to improve teacher working conditions. The NEA believed that the relationship between teachers and the supervisors of teachers (school administrators and school boards) should be collegial and not based on the traditional adversarial collective bargaining relationship. School administrators greatly appreciated this mindset of the NEA; in fact school administrators dominated the leadership of the NEA until the late 1960's.<sup>2</sup>

But facing an increasing desire of teachers to have a voice in the establishment of their salaries and working conditions, rather than have those terms dictated by school boards, the NEA slowly but surely changed its orientation. One significant measure of the change was the NEA's creation in 1970 of UniServ, a group of full time field organizers to assist teachers in collective bargaining struggles. The NEA's Washington State affiliate, the Washington Education Association (WEA), also was prominent in shaping the new orientation. In 1965, the WEA successfully pushed the Washington State legislature to adopt the Professional Negotiations Act (PNA), a one page law that required school boards to negotiate with elected teacher representatives over teacher working conditions. The law also offered an impasse procedure whereby school boards and teacher representatives could submit—if they both agreed that negotiations had reached an impasse—their claims to a mediation committee composed of superintendants and teachers from other Washington State school districts. With the PNA as law, it was not long before Washington State districts—for example Seattle and

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the evolution of American teachers' unions over most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Marjorie Murphy. "Blackboard Unions: *The AFT & the NEA, 1900-1980.*" Cornell University Press: Ithaca & London, 1990.

Tacoma in 1968 and 1969, respectively,—concluded their first teacher collective bargaining agreements.<sup>3</sup>

While the PNA mandated collective bargaining for teachers, it made no mention of the teachers' right to strike. Many Washington State judges, in the early 1970's, seemed to believe that teacher strikes were illegal. With legally cloudy justification, teachers in Aberdeen launched the first K-12 teachers strike in Washington State history in the spring of 1972. The strike lasted three days before teachers complied with a Superior Court judge's injunction against the strike. The following year, four teacher strikes took place in the state with the work stoppage by teachers in the Evergreen district--near Vancouver, Washington--the most notable. The Evergreen strike resulted in nearly six weeks of jail time for three senior leaders of the Evergreen Education Association (EEA) after teachers refused to abide by a local judge's injunction against the strike.

#### *Federal Way Schools and Teacher Militancy*

Teacher militancy on display in districts like Evergreen was not missing among Federal Way teachers. The FWEA became notable in the early 1970's for its fighting spirit as it strove to gain a greater teacher voice in the conduct of Federal Way schools. As the FWEA's bellicosity grew, relations between it and the Federal Way school board showed a very high level of acrimony.

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Kink. "Teacher Strikes in Washington." History Link Essay 9763. March 22, 2011. *Steve Kink & John Cahill Class Wars: The Story of the Washington Education Association, 1965-2001*, 194-195



The first significant sign of the serious strain between the FWEA and the school board revealed itself with the mid-1972 launch of a recall campaign against three of the five school board members: Vera Fredrickson, John Hale and Board president John Bocek. At its outset, the campaign was led by William Jenkins, chairman of a community group called “Citizens for Upgrading Education” and Therese Keisling, chairwoman of the Federal Way Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA). Some of the claims against the three board members did not directly relate to FWEA concerns but others did. The FWEA backed the recall movement, which prominently placed among its complaints against the three the charge that they had refused to negotiate in good faith with the teachers union. The campaign also charged the three with voting in May 1972 to appoint, as Federal Way school superintendent (George Cochran), someone ethically unqualified for the job. Some of the claims against Cochran did not relate to the FWEA. For example, Keisling charged that, while Cochran served in his previous capacity as superintendent of another Washington State school district, the district had falsely claimed to provide educational services to disabled students. However the teachers had no shortage of their own claims against the superintendent. The union seemed to regard Cochran as aligned with members of the school board least hospitable to the FWEA, such as John Bocek and Vera Fredrickson. Michael Comstock, a substitute teacher in the district in 1974, also remembers that teachers were upset at Cochran’s introduction of “Open Concept” schools in the district—where several teachers taught as many as sixty or seventy students in one classroom--and wasteful spending on phonics reading programs that were never used. Cochran and the FWEA

would have a notably stormy relationship until Cochran resigned as superintendent, under pressure, in early 1975.<sup>4</sup>



**Dr. George Cochran**

**Figure 1 – Dr. George Cochran.  
(Courtesy *Federal Way News*.)**

Along with the recall campaign, which would end with the holding of a recall election in November 1973, there were other prominent incidents reflecting the strongly adversarial relations between the school board and the FWEA. In April 1973, the FWEA took out a full page ad in the *Federal Way News* claiming that a recent issue of the school board’s newsletter *FIND*

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<sup>4</sup> “Cochran Named Superintendant in Stormy School Board Meeting,” *Federal Way News*, May 31 1972, Sec 1, 1. “Charges Filed against Bocek, Hale, Fredrickson.” *Federal Way News*, June 14, 1972. Sec 1, 1. “Petitions Circulated: Recall Drive Underway,” *Federal Way News*, April 4, 1973, Sec 1, 1, “Vera Fredrickson, Therese Keisling Presents Arguments Pro and Con Recall,” *Federal Way News*, October 24, 1973. Sec 1, 1. Michael Comstock to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 11, 2013.

implied that FWEA members only cared about the financial security of teachers and were unconcerned with providing quality education to students. The FWEA ad declared that this charge was untrue and that its members were strongly committed to quality education.

Meanwhile, FWEA Executive Secretary Hal Collins suffered a heart attack after a school board meeting in early June 1973 where he engaged in a shouting match with board president Bocek and Superintendent Cochran. The argument was rooted in disagreement over the manner of the district's efforts to secure greater funding for the reduction of class sizes. The 42 year old Collins had a history of heart difficulties and survived the attack; his heart attack and the context of it provided a notable symbol of the increased tension between teachers and the school district. The class size issue served to heighten teacher tempers at a school board meeting in late June 1973, where an estimated 100 teachers packed a room in the district's Educational Services building, many carrying placards critical of the school board. Tempers flared when the majority of the school board voted—without preliminary public input-- to present Federal Way voters the following September with a levy election designed to secure increased revenue for reducing class sizes. Besides the decision to present a levy to the voters without public input, also incensing the teachers was the board's last minute vote during the meeting to hold the levy election in September rather than voting on the general election date, as was previously planned, at a future meeting. Superintendent Cochran, who also served as school board secretary, stated at the meeting that the board needed no public input before voting to hold the levy election because it had received enough public input before a levy election the previous April. The April 1973 levy election, as with the planned election in September, contained a measure providing for reduced class sizes. The April measure was

rejected by voters, with only a 54 percent approval, short of the 60 percent figure required for passage of school levy elections in Washington State.<sup>5</sup>

The blocking of public input created a tempestuous atmosphere in the meeting room. It spurred FWEA president John Metcalf to repeatedly interrupt the meeting's proceedings with demands to speak. Board president John Bocek declared Metcalf out of order and temporarily adjourned the meeting. Teachers in the audience disrupted the proceedings with chants of "We Want Metcalf." Metcalf eventually was allowed to speak but the meeting broke up as a crowd of teachers and parents surrounded the school board table. The meeting disintegrated into shouting matches. Federal Way Fire Chief Oril Swieso arrived and broke up the meeting on the ground that the meeting room was over-capacity. FWEA member Lee Ann Prielipp later remembered that many attendees at the meeting, including herself, received tickets for illegal parking; the FWEA paid the fines of members who received the tickets.<sup>6</sup>

Bocek rescheduled the meeting two days later at Federal Way High School's Little Theater. This second meeting was again packed with angry teachers. This meeting, somewhat less rowdy than the first, was again marked by the refusal of Bocek to allow Metcalf to speak and Metcalf's constantly interrupting the meeting's proceedings. Metcalf refused to cease his disruptions and Bocek permanently adjourned the meeting. "Most of the audience remained

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<sup>5</sup> Federal Way Education Association. "To the Patrons of the Federal Way Public Schools." Full Page Ad, *Federal Way News*, April 4, 1973. Sec 2, 15. "Educator Suffers Coronary over Class Sizes," *Federal Way News*, June 13 1973. Sec 1, 1. Jim Shahan, "Class Size Issue: Board Meeting Adjourned because of Disruptions," *Federal Way News*, July 4 1973. Sec 1, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Shahan. "Board Meeting Adjourned because of Disruptions," Sec 1, 1. Lee Ann Prielipp to the author, E-mail Communication, November 10, 2013.

after adjournment and a number of shouting matches erupted,” reported *Federal Way News* managing editor Jim Shahan.<sup>7</sup>

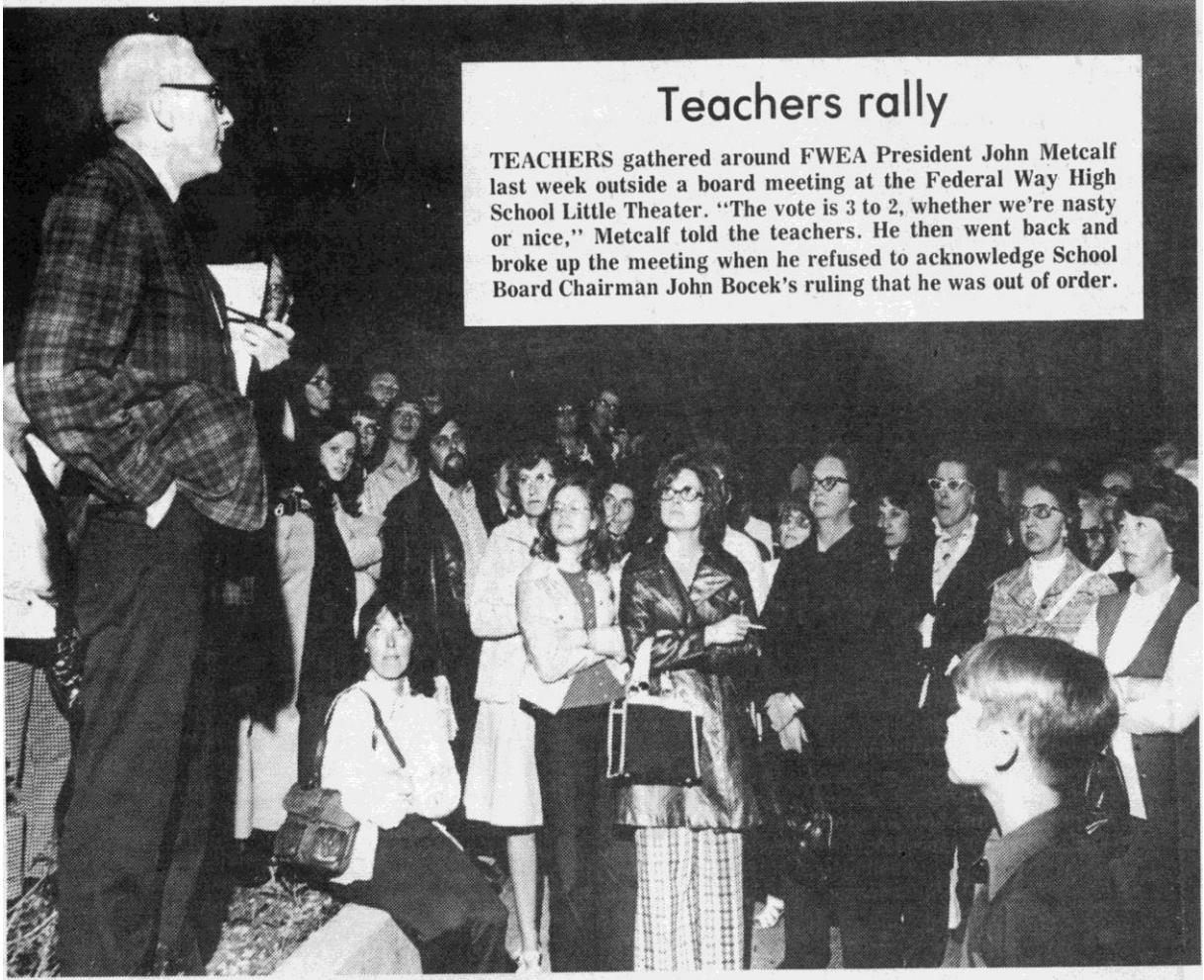
A *Federal Way News* editorial days later reflected on the two tumultuous meetings, attacking the teachers for displaying rudeness and attempting to intimidate the school board. But the editorial also declared that the majority of the school board brought the disruption on themselves with their “high handed” tactics in deciding to schedule a vote on the levy.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 2 - FWEA members surround school board members at the June 27, 1973 meeting in protest at board tactics relating to the issue of class sizes. (Courtesy *Federal Way News*.)

<sup>7</sup> Shahan. “Board Meeting Adjourned because of Disruptions,” Sec 1, 1

<sup>8</sup> “Educator Suffers Coronary Over Class Sizes.” “Editorial: Lets All Calm Down,” *Federal Way News*, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1973, Sec 1, 2



**Figure 3 - FWEA president John Metcalf, far left, addresses FWEA members during an intermission of the school board meeting on June 29, 1973. (Courtesy *Federal Way News*.)**

Jim Shahan later reported that, after the tumultuous meetings, the board considered acquiring a restraining order against the FWEA to prevent further disruptions. Board member Rol Malan also told the *Federal Way News* that he had consulted a prosecuting attorney who

assured him that, in light of FWEA disruption, the board would be within its rights to hold meetings without public participation.<sup>9</sup>

Another disruption at a school board meeting in late September 1973, also revolved around the class size issue. The meeting featured negotiations between the board and FWEA negotiators on class sizes. However the meeting ended when FWEA negotiators and the small contingent of teachers present staged a walk-out to protest what they argued was Superintendent Cochran's improper interjection into the class size debate. At the meeting Cochran made a statement declaring his desire to correct what he said were incorrect FWEA claims about district finances. The FWEA and teachers walked out after Cochran's interjection, earning themselves a harsh rebuke from the *Federal Way News* editors. Under the heading "Repugnant Behavior," an editorial declared that the incident demonstrated uncivil conduct on the part of the teachers and that Cochran's rebuttal to the FWEA's claims was impressive.<sup>10</sup>

In September 1973, Federal Way voters ruled on the issue, class sizes, which had caused so much uproar the previous three months. Fifty eight percent of voters rejected the district's levy ballot proposal to increase property taxes for the purpose of reducing class sizes. Voters also rejected a ballot measure to raise revenue through the floating of bonds. These two failed ballot measures were the beginning of a state record established by Federal Way voters by the end of the 1970's. From September 1973 until June 1980, Federal Way voters rejected 22 consecutive levy ballot measures, putting their school district frequently in severe financial

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<sup>9</sup> Jim Shahan, "John Bocek's Eight Years on the board: The Faces Change but Charges Remain," *Federal Way News*, October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1973, sec 1, 1.

<sup>10</sup> "Editorial: Repugnant Behavior." *Federal Way News*, September 12, 1973, sec 1, 2.

straits throughout the 1970's. More importantly from the perspective of this paper, the levy defeats also played a prominent role in the Federal Way teachers strike of 1974.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Battle Intensifies: Recall Election*

The deepest manifestation of conflict between the FWEA and school board before the 1974 teachers strike was undoubtedly the 1973 recall election. To a large extent, the election saw the FWEA succeed in its efforts to make the school board friendlier. Two of the three targets of the recall campaign, John Hale and board president John Bocek, were removed from office while the third, Vera Fredrickson, escaped removal by only 15 votes. Meanwhile, James Kenney, the board member most sympathetic to the FWEA, was re-elected. Bocek was replaced by Richard Schoon, who had received FWEA endorsement during the election campaign. Going into 1974, the FWEA seemed to be in a stronger position than before in its relations with the board.

In October 1973, the month after voters removed him from office, Bocek was interviewed by Jim Shahan of the *Federal Way News*. Bocek attributed his defeat to the rising power of the FWEA. He lamented what he believed to be a recent decline in civility in Federal Way school politics; he seemed to link this decline in civility to the newly emerged militancy of the FWEA as he made reference to the raucous board meetings about the class sizes controversy held the previous June:

In prior years we never saw the extreme rudeness, the complete disregard for others' rights. We disagreed with people without name calling and

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<sup>11</sup> "Unofficial Return." *Federal Way News*, September 19, 1973, sec 1, 1



shouting. Also in prior years we never had this aggressive action on the part of the FWEA leadership.<sup>12</sup>

Bocek told Shahan that his differences with the FWEA were based around a simple question: who was in control of Federal Way schools, the teachers or the school board? Bocek explained that he believed the school board was legally entitled to direct the school district. In contrast, Bocek implied that the FWEA believed that it should control the district. He charged that, in the past, the FWEA had kept the school board “in negotiations until we capitulate to their” demands. Bocek implied that the FWEA attempted to use negotiations to wear down the school board until the board ceded further control of the district to the teachers.<sup>13</sup>

John Bocek’s eight years on the Federal Way School Board came to an end in 1973 but controversy in the Federal Way School District would only increase in 1974. In the months before the strike erupted in August 1974, the district’s financial troubles increased and, in collective bargaining negotiations between the board and the FWEA, the two sides grew less and less able to reach agreement on key issues. Teachers had exercised a new found militancy in 1973 and by August 1974, they were prepared to launch their first ever work stoppage in order to achieve their goals.

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<sup>12</sup> Shahan, “John Bocek’s Eight Years on the Board,” sec 1, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Shahan, “John Bocek’s Eight Years on the Board,” sec 1, 1.



Figure 4 - Striking teacher Carol Coe perches on a fence amidst picket signs at Thomas Jefferson High School during the 1974 Federal Way teachers strike. In 1975 Coe would be elected as president of the Washington Education Association (WEA). (Courtesy *Federal Way News*.)

## Chapter 2: Before the Strike, 1974

A number of factors swirled around the Federal Way School District in the months and years before the 1974 teachers' strike. One factor was the serious financial difficulties of the school district. The school board claimed that the financial difficulties prevented substantial salary increases to Federal Way teachers. The FWEA refused to accept the truth of this claim and demanded substantial salary hikes. A second was the relatively low pay and poor financial security of Federal Way teachers. Under these conditions, and inspired by growing teacher militancy across Washington State, it was probably inevitable that the teachers would strike. A third problem revolved around the refusal of the school board to consider negotiating certain subjects with the FWEA. This chapter will describe these three factors

### *Teacher Salaries and School District Poverty*

The salary hike controversy was perhaps the most prominent of the factors. The school board was adamant that, because of its financial difficulties, it could not grant the salary hikes demanded by the FWEA. The board had plausible arguments on which to make its case. For one, there was the district's relative poverty. In June 1969, the *Federal Way News* reported that in terms of assessed valuation per student (the amount of money available to educate each student) the Federal Way School District was the poorest in King County. By 1974, the district appeared to be no longer the poorest but was still among the poor. In March of that year, Federal Way had an assessed valuation of \$13,994 per student (with an enrollment of 16,316 students). Meanwhile, Bellevue, King County's richest school district, had an assessed valuation of \$29,244 per student (with an enrollment of 22,469). Along with this relative

poverty, the district experienced an extraordinarily rapid growth in population. The district reported an enrollment of 8,893 in the fall of 1965 but the number rose to 16,191 in 1971. In April 1967, a King County government estimate placed Federal Way schools as experiencing the fastest growth of any school district in the entire United States. In the midst of such poverty and the efforts to secure increased funding for its rapidly expanding student population, the idea seemed plausible--at least on the surface--that the district would have great difficulty providing its teachers with the 10 percent salary increase demanded by the FWEA on the eve of the 1974 strike.<sup>14</sup>

### *Taxpayers Revolt*

Compounding the school districts' financial difficulties was the rejection by voters of the district's general operations and maintenance levy on April 9, 1974, and then the rejection of a watered down version of the same levy the following July 16. The rejection of the two levies occurred in the wake of agitation in Federal Way against the level of property taxes required to fund the schools. This agitation included the formation of Federal Way's anti-property tax "Save Your Home Committee" headed by Dennis Hudlicky and John Pancratz. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, the \$7.8 million general maintenance and operations levy was rejected by a whopping 82 percent of the voters who participated. A watered down July 16 version of the same levy received 51 percent approval but far short of the 60 percent needed for passage. According to school board president Rol Malan and board member Richard Schoon, the levy defeats deprived the school

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<sup>14</sup> "Federal Way Schools Pace Rapid Expansion," *Federal Way News*, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1967, Sec 1, 1, "School District County's Poorest." *Federal Way News*, June 11, 1969, Sec. 1, 1, "School District Enrollment High; Valuation Low." *Federal Way News*, January 10 1973, Sec 1, 1. Jim Shahan. "Levy Must Bear the Brunt of Increased Costs: Spiraling taxes threaten School Election," *Federal Way News*, March 27, 1974, Sec 1, 1.

district of 20 percent of its expected revenue for the 1974-75 school year; the raging inflation then prevalent in the United States further reduced the value of district funds. For the defeat of the July 16 levy, Malan blamed the “negative atmosphere” in the district created by the no confidence vote passed by the FWEA two months earlier against Superintendent Cochran. He also blamed the Save Your Home Committee and a parent’s organization for contributing to the defeat. The defeat of the two levies in 1974 provided a prime justification for the school board to deny the FWEA the teacher salary increases it demanded. The question of the availability of revenues to fund the salary increases demanded by the FWEA remained a hot button issue throughout the strike, with the FWEA insisting that the school district possessed adequate funds to provide the increases. The salary controversy will be discussed again below.<sup>15</sup>

While the school board and FWEA wrestled with salary increases, another point of controversy between the two sides was an inability to agree on what items were to be included in negotiations. From the beginning of the negotiations for the teachers’ 1974-75 contract in January 1974, the FWEA continuously complained about the school board’s insistence on excluding certain matters from negotiations. A December 1973 opinion by Washington State Attorney General Slade Gorton—seconded by the state supreme court the following month—declared that the state’s Professional Negotiations Act (PNA) required that state school boards negotiate with teachers only on matters related to financial compensation. According to FWEA president John Metcalf, the Federal Way School Board used these rulings to refuse to negotiate

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<sup>15</sup> Shahan, “Levy Must Bear the Brunt of Increased Costs.” “After Levy Failure: Board Wrestling Question of What to do next?” *Federal Way News*, April 17, 1974, Sec 1, 1, Constantine Angelos. “Federal Way: Will ‘no’ turn to ‘yes?’” *Seattle Times*, July 14 1974, Sec B1, 29. “Federal Way again Rejects School Levy.” *Seattle Times*, July 17, 1974. Sec A, 5, “FW Board to Ponder Cuts.” *Federal Way News*, July 17, 1974, Sec 1, 1. Schoon & Malan, “Board Officials Relate Negotiation Problems,.” Sec 1, 2.

with the union on 28 items outside the sphere of financial compensation. These items included class sizes, the use of auxiliary personnel, teacher leaves, transfer and school assignments, academic freedom, due process and teaching hours. To judge by the minutes of negotiation sessions between the two parties in July and August 1974, the school board eventually agreed to negotiate some of these items but remained unwilling to discuss others. In negotiation sessions on July 30 and August 9 the board—invoking the opinion of the state attorney general and state supreme court—refused to negotiate such subjects as teacher school assignments and transfers, class sizes, the provision of psychologists and counselors to schools and teacher work hours.<sup>16</sup>

### *Teachers' Low Salaries*

While the FWEA demanded a greater voice in shaping the instructional environment in Federal Way schools, they also had to contend with low salaries. On September 4, 1974, after the strike began, school board president Rol Malan, writing in the *Federal Way News*, fully admitted that the teachers experienced low pay. But he claimed that because of the district's poverty, he could do nothing about it. Federal Way schools, in terms of assessed valuation per pupil, were the poorest in King County. Also, Malan pointed out, Federal Way voters had already that year twice rejected maintenance and operation levies, depriving the district of revenue from property taxes. "These factors," stated Malan, "point to an economic and work

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<sup>16</sup> Federal Way School Board Minutes, July 30, 1974, 9, 10, 14. Archives: Federal Way School Board Minutes, July 30, 1974 (adjourned to August 1<sup>st</sup> 1974). 2,3. Archives: Federal Way School District. Federal Way School Board Minutes August 9, 1974. 5,6, 10. Archives: Federal Way School District. "Keeping You Informed." May 13, 1974, FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations, 1974-75. "1974 Strike" Packet. Folder: Committees: Public Relations Bulletins and News Releases."

environment that is particularly bleak for anyone who has elected to work for the public schools in Federal Way.”<sup>17</sup>

The economic environment in Federal Way simply stated is that there is not enough money to pay teachers at a level which is comparable to surrounding school districts without materially degrading the educational program.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of Malan’s admission of the “bleak” environment facing Federal Way teachers, he had no sympathy for the striking teachers. He declared that the Federal Way teachers strike was illegal, “disgraceful and an outrage” while constituting “insurrection” against the taxpayers that funded the schools.<sup>19</sup>

On the same day that Malan’s letter was issued, the *Federal Way News’s* Jim Shahan commented about the low salaries potentially undermining the strike. He predicted the teachers would be in deep trouble if the school district went forth with its plan to open the schools with substitute teachers as strikebreakers. As Federal Way teachers were “the lowest paid of any in the area and consequently live from payday to payday,” they could not hold out very long in a strike. If the school district could maintain its operations with the substitute teachers, then the strike could be broken. As few teachers could afford to lose their paycheck for a lengthy period, it would be easy to force them to return to work.<sup>20</sup>

The teachers’ low wages, when compared to their colleagues in surrounding districts, were probably a major factor in making the strike inevitable. However, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, Shahan’s predictions did not come true. The district used substitute teachers

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<sup>17</sup> Rol Malan “Teachers’ Strike Against People Claims Malan.” *Federal Way News*, September 4, 1974, Sec 1, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Malan. “Teachers’ Strike Against People claims Malan,” Sec 1, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Malan. “Teachers Strike Against People claims Malan,” Sec 1, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Shahan. “Key to Educational Strife Held by the Parents.” *Federal Way News*, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1974. Sec 1, 3.

as strikebreakers, enraging the striking teachers and resulting in much tumult, but it did not succeed in breaking the strike. The teachers eventually forced a settlement on the school board that was much closer to the FWEA's demands than to the school board's offers.



### Chapter 3: The Federal Way Teachers Strike

The first Federal Way teachers strike lasted twenty days, from August 29 to September 17, 1974. The teachers saw the strike as an effort to gain greater financial security and an equal voice in the operation of their classrooms (as opposed to the total control exercised over district operations by the school board). Controversies during the strike revolved around teacher tactics toward people crossing the picket line whether they were parents, bus drivers or strike-breaking replacement teachers. The FWEA's most implacable opponents on the school board made much public comment about the supposed uncivil, even criminal conduct of teachers on the picket line.. In spite of the charges, the teachers remained defiant and convinced of the justice of their cause. As striking teacher David Locey proclaimed, if Rol Malan's charge was true that the strike was an insurrection against Federal Way taxpayers, then one also "might consider the actions of Dr. Cochran and the school board to be desperate despotism." This chapter will discuss the major controversies and events that took place during the 1974 strike.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The Strike Begins*

The teachers voted to begin their strike on August 29, the day before they were required to appear at their workplaces to begin preparations for the scheduled opening of school on September 3. At the beginning of the strike, the *Federal Way News* reported that the two sides remained far apart on key issues and had only reached agreement on minor housekeeping items. The FWEA demanded a 10.5 percent increase in salaries while the school

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<sup>21</sup> David H Locey. "Newsreaders Speak Out: Teacher Argues with Board's Promise to Negotiate Face to Face." *Federal Way News*, September 11, 1974, Sec 1, 2.

board, citing the district's precarious financial situation, offered only 4.8 percent. King County Superior Court Judge Erie Horswill issued an injunction against the strike and ordered the school opening delayed until September 10 to allow negotiations to continue. The teachers would never comply with the injunction but faced no legal consequences for not doing so.<sup>22</sup>

The day before the strike began, on August 28, the school board met and passed a resolution which among other things condemned the strike and called for the exploration of legal methods to terminate it. At the board meeting, board counsel Elvin Vandenberg of the Tacoma law firm *Kane, Vandenberg and Hartinger* advised the school district that it needed to hire substitute teachers as strikebreakers if it wished to continue receiving state funds during the strike. Washington State law required that schools must maintain a minimum student to teacher ratio in order to receive state government funds. At the meeting, the four board members present (the fifth, Richard Schoon, was absent) presented a united front.<sup>23</sup>

Board member James Kenney included himself in this front. An FWEA paper intended early in the strike for presentation to the local media described Kenney in extremely glowing terms. It appeared that the FWEA regarded Kenney (a PhD in physics employed by the Boeing Company) as by far its strongest ally on the board. The paper praised him as "a champion of teachers," a defender of student rights and "by far the most intelligent man on the board side." Kenney, at an August 30 board meeting, however agreed with his colleagues that the strike was "not in the best interests of the district." He said that he disagreed with some aspects of the

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<sup>22</sup> Jim Shahan. "Federal Way Schools Set to Open Sept 10," *Federal Way News*. September 4, 1974. Sec 1, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Federal Way School Board. Special Meeting: Minutes, August 28, 1974, 3. Federal Way School District Archives.

resolutions against the strike produced by his colleagues. However he promised to be a good soldier and support the resolutions nonetheless.<sup>24</sup>

After Kenney, the only other school board member described in the above mentioned paper with any positive tone was Richard Schoon. Schoon received the endorsement of the FWEA in the recall election the previous year and was described by the paper as supportive of the FWEA on most issues. However, after the strike settlement on September 17, Schoon would be in the forefront of alleging that the FWEA used extortion to obtain the settlement.<sup>25</sup>

### *Issues in the Strike*

Before the settlement, while the strike raged, teacher salaries were a primary focus of controversy. Rol Malan repeatedly insisted that the district's poor financial situation—magnified by the defeat of the two levies earlier in the year—precluded the 10.5 percent salary hike demanded by the FWEA. The FWEA on the other hand alleged that the district possessed nearly \$2 million in a reserve fund which it could easily use to implement the salary increases. Rol Malan, in his September 4 letter to the *Federal Way News*, claimed that the fund contained “nowhere near the amount” alleged by the FWEA. The September 1974 issue of *FIND*, the school board's newsletter, reported an offer of the board to submit district expenses for inspection by a court appointed auditor who would then provide the public with light about the competing FWEA and school board claims about available funds for salary increases. This proposal was formally approved by the board at its September 9 meeting but it is unclear what

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<sup>24</sup> Federal Way School Board. Special Meeting: Minutes, August 28, 1974, 10,11. “For Media Information: Who's Who in Federal Way Education Crisis.” Undated. FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations 1974-75, “1974 Strike” packet. Folder: “Copies: Strike Materials.”

<sup>25</sup> “For Media Information: Who's Who in Federal Way Education Crisis.”

became of it. A claim has been made to me that the audit was held and it gave credibility to FWEA claims. However I have not been able to find documentation about this audit so this is all I will write about the salary increase controversy for now.<sup>26</sup>

As the two sides quarreled over salary increases, the FWEA, as before the strike, continued to press its claim that the board unjustly refused to negotiate certain subjects. FWEA president Patrick Dunham wrote to the *Federal Way News* on September 11, explaining that he believed “a key issue” in the strike was the district’s refusal to negotiate class sizes and the number of workdays and hours for teachers.<sup>27</sup>

By September 11, the FWEA reported that it was willing to compromise on the class size issue. It offered to accept the same class sizes in 1974-75 as Federal Way teachers taught during the 1973-74 school year; however it rejected the board’s insistence that teachers needed to accept greater class sizes as a result of the two levy failures in 1974.<sup>28</sup>

### The Teachers Demand a Voice

Underlying the teachers’ negotiation strategy was a desire to secure a voice in the operation of their classrooms and the erosion of the school board’s near total control over decision making power in the district. As John Metcalf, Dunham’s predecessor as FWEA

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<sup>26</sup> Malan. “Teachers Strike Against People Claims Malan, 2. Federal Way School Board. Regular Meeting: Minutes, September 9, 1974, Federal Way School Board archives. George C Cochran. “Superintendent’s Message.” *FIND*, September 1974, 2. “Board Urges Court Audit of School Finance, Expenses.” *FIND*, September 1974. (The September 1974 issue of *FIND*—the official school district publication—is available in the historical education file at the Historical Society of Federal Way). Patrick Dunham. “Newsreaders Speak Out: Teachers Appreciate Parents Understanding.” *Federal Way News*, September 11, 1974, Sec 1, 2. Shahan. “Key to Educational Strife Held by Parents,” Sec 1, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Dunham. “Teachers’ Appreciate Parents Understanding,” Sec 1, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Bill Ostlund, Jim Keck and Jim Shahan, “School Bells Ring Despite Strike: WEA Rejects Board Offer by 92 percent.” *Federal Way News*, September 11, 1974, Sec 1, 1.

president, wrote in January 1974, “If we are to be held accountable for our instruction, we must have a voice in the decision making.” The FWEA saw the board’s refusal to negotiate certain items it considered important as derailing its effort to secure a greater voice. As striking teacher Ann Kelleher declared in a letter to the *Federal Way News*, teachers “could not abide” by a negotiation process where she claimed the board was only willing to negotiate “salary and the heating and lighting of our classrooms.”<sup>29</sup>

In response to the charge by the organization’s critics that the FWEA wanted to dominate the district, a FWEA pamphlet declared:

We believe that the teachers should have a voice in the decisions which affect the education in this district. A voice which is equal to but not exclusive of the school board, the PTSA and every citizen in the district is what we desire. We recognize that education is a partnership. We want only to be equal partners. So, when you hear someone say that we are trying to take all of the power away from the school board, be FAIR, ask them if they have ever read any of our proposals. All of our proposals contain wording which gives us only an equal voice. After all, we are trained to teach and make educational decisions, that is what we are paid to do. Why not let us do it?<sup>30</sup>

### *Striking Teachers and the Picket Line*

While FWEA representatives demanded a voice in the operation of the school district, the teachers were faced with the school board’s use of substitute teachers as strikebreakers. They also were faced with the matter of various individuals—including bus drivers—who

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<sup>29</sup> John Metcalf. “Keeping You Informed.” Jan 29, 1974, FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations, 1974-75. “1974 Strike” Packet. Folder: Committees: Public Relations Bulletins and News Releases. Ann Kelleher. “Newsreaders Speak Out: Striking Teacher Questions School Board Expenditures.” *Federal Way News*, September 11, 1974, Sec 1, 2.

<sup>30</sup> “FWEA and Negotiations.” July 1974. FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations 1974-75, “1974 Strike” packet. Folder: “Copies: Strike Materials.”

crossed the picket line. Substitute teachers and administrators staffed classrooms as school opened September 10. Superintendent Cochran reported to the school board that 536 certified teachers, mostly substitutes, staffed the schools on opening day. The teachers who reported for work included 56 regular teachers who defied their colleagues and crossed the picket line, apparently in order to either assume classroom duties or to secure temporary non-classroom employment with the district. Cochran stated that school attendance was 47 percent of that expected on opening day. It appeared that a relatively large number of parents chose to keep their children at home rather than send them to school during the strike.<sup>31</sup>

Attendance dropped to one third of expectations on the second day of school, September 11, as bus drivers joined other non-certified district employees in what would ultimately be a three day strike. At the outset of the teachers strike, the bus drivers and other non-certified personnel had, within their separate union, voted to honor the strike before the opening of school on September 10. They also voted to abide by Judge Horswill's injunction against it. By this decision the non-certified personnel more or less stated their intention to cross the picket line. This greatly angered teachers. *The Federal Way News* reported on September 11 that some bus drivers complained that, as they drove onto school grounds, picketing teachers spit on their busses, shouted obscenities, threw eggs at the busses and banged them with picket signs. It is not clear how frequently such teacher abuse of bus drivers

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<sup>31</sup> Federal Way School Board. "Special Meeting: Minutes: September 10, 1974 (adjourned to September 11, 1974)," 2. Archives: Federal Way School District.1974. Federal Way School Board archives. Federal Way School Board. "Special meeting: Minutes: September 11, 1974," 1. Archives: Federal Way School Board. In contrast to the figure of 56 regular teachers who crossed the picket line, striking teacher Lee Ann Prielipp remembers "fewer than 30" regular teachers crossing the picket line. It is possible that there were regular teachers who decided to join the strike after initially crossing the picket line. Lee Ann Prielipp to the author, E-mail Communication, November 11, 2013.

and the busses occurred. Several bus drivers hastened to tell the *Federal Way News* that their strike was based on their own needs and was in no way sympathetic with the strike of the teachers, with whom they were very angry. *Federal Way News* reporter Bill Ostlund reported on September 18 an incident illustrative of the hostile feeling of bus drivers toward the teachers. As teachers lingered in the middle of a vehicle entrance to one school with their picket signs, an approaching school bus (empty of students) substantially increased its speed as it neared the teachers. The teachers were forced to jump quickly back onto the curb as the bus raced by them. Ostlund reported one incident at Kilo Junior High where busses needed police assistance to leave the school grounds, their exit apparently deliberately blocked by picketing teachers. This hostility was in marked contrast to the tone of driver-teacher relations the previous June, when the district narrowly averted a strike of bus drivers. In the days before the strike was averted, John Metcalf, then FWEA president, reported “a strong feeling of solidarity” among teachers for the drivers and other non-certified personnel. Metcalf reported that teachers felt that they should not cross the picket line if the drivers and teachers aides struck.<sup>32</sup>

The difficult relations between bus drivers and teachers was reflective of a larger tension between teachers and persons crossing the picket line, whether strikebreaking teachers, members of the community, parents, or bus drivers. An early indicator of such tension was a letter dated August 30, the day after the strike began, from FWEA president Patrick Dunham to a female community resident. Dunham’s letter, in response to the woman’s

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<sup>32</sup> Shahan. “Federal Way Schools Set to Open Sept 10,” Sec 1, 1. “Keeping You Informed,” June 3, 1974. FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations, 1974-75. “1974 Strike” Packet. Folder: Committees: Public Relations Bulletins and News Releases.”. “Weekend Negotiation Avert School Bus Driver Walkout.” *Federal Way News*, June 5 1974. Sec 1,1. “Bus Drivers Vote to Strike” *Federal Way News*. September 11 1974. Sec 1,1. Bill Ostlund. ““Scab, Scab, Scab’ Greeting for Substitutes.” *Federal Way News*, September 18, 1974, Sec 1, 13.

complaint apologized, in Dunham's words, for "the unfortunate incident you encountered this morning" in front of Lake Grove Elementary. The nature of the incident was not elaborated upon but it seemed that the woman believed a picketing teacher had been overly aggressive in attempting to prevent her from crossing the picket line. Dunham reported that FWEA investigators could not confirm or deny the complaint of the woman but allowed that "it is entirely possible" a picketing teacher "over-expressed himself [sic]." Dunham stated that overly-aggressive behavior went against the FWEA's policy of instructing pickets to "peacefully dissuade" persons from crossing the picket line.<sup>33</sup>

At the picket line, no relations were tenser than that between striking teachers and the strikebreaking teachers. The teachers' animosity towards the strikebreakers was obviously rooted in the feeling that the replacement teachers threatened to take their jobs and derail their efforts to secure greater economic security and control over the direction of their classrooms. Federal Way teachers were fighting, in Ann Kelleher's words, for "professional survival"; obviously many saw strikebreaking teachers as a threat to that survival. Many striking teachers probably agreed with FWEA president Patrick Denham's declaration that the school board was intransigent in negotiations and "only recognizes strength." Thus they tried to demonstrate strength toward the school board by aggressive actions towards strikebreaking teachers crossing the picket line.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Patrick Dunham to Mrs. John W Aldrich," August 30, 1974. FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations, 1974-75. Packet: 1974 Strike. Folder: Copies: Strike Materials.

<sup>34</sup> Dunham. "Teachers' Appreciate Parents Understanding," Sec 1, 2. Kelleher. "Newsreaders Speak Out: Striking Teacher Questions School Board Expenditures," Sec 2, 1.



In a 2004 memoir, two senior officials of the Washington Education Association (WEA) in the 1970's, Steve Kink and John Cahill, remembered that some Federal Way "teachers were reluctant to yell at scabs and attempt to block them." However they remembered that teachers at Kilo Junior High and Thomas Jefferson High school, "in particular, were more than eager to challenge the scabs." A seemingly fairly typical encounter between the two sides at one school was described by Bill Ostlund. The substitutes were brought in by bus from the district's administration building. Picketing teachers surrounded the bus and then slowly dispersed, slowing the vehicle's progress. As the substitutes exited the bus the picketers shouted "scab, scab!" The substitutes entered the building unmolested by the teachers, who resumed their picketing. If the substitute teachers themselves were unmolested, their vehicles did not always escape. Ostlund mentioned "reports of substitute teachers having the air let out of their tires and having gas caps stolen."<sup>35</sup>

It is not clear how frequently such incidents of abuse against the substitutes' vehicles occurred. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, thuggish behavior by teachers on the picket line was frequently cited by the school board and its supporters in order to discredit the teachers. To judge by the news reports, the vast majority of teachers refrained from property crimes and assaults on strike-breaking teachers were virtually non-existent. FWEA communications director Roger Gray denied to the *Seattle Times* that acts of vandalism against strikebreakers' cars were the work of FWEA members. He also denied that one notable

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<sup>35</sup> Ostlund. " 'Scab, Scab, Scab' Greeting for Substitutes," Sec 1, 13.

incident, the placing of logs in front of the entrance to Decatur High school, was the work of striking teachers.<sup>36</sup>

A significantly greater number of striking teachers probably indulged in verbal abuse of strikebreakers than those that engaged in destruction of property. Michael Comstock, a strikebreaking teacher (who later became a regular teacher and FWEA president) remembers no violence towards his person or his property but does recall “some name calling” by striking teachers as he crossed the picket line at Mark Twain Elementary. He was soon contacted by FWEA activist Teri Packard who exhorted him to discontinue crossing the picket line. He explained to her and other FWEA members that he had signed a contract to teach in the district before the strike started. He was warned by the district that if he refused to teach during the strike he would be precluded from teaching in Federal Way when the strike was over. The explanation of his difficult predicament appeared to dampen the hostility towards him on the part of striking teachers. It also led to his increasing interest in the FWEA’s ideas and his eventual presidency of the organization many years later.<sup>37</sup>

While the district offered, to what extent is not clear, bus rides for substitute teachers, many substitutes drove their vehicles directly to the school where they were employed and parked their vehicles there in the midst of hostile picketers. The strikebreaking teachers did not always confront the picketers with relative passivity. FWEA files reveal allegations of picketing teachers receiving minor injuries at the hands of substitutes impatient to drive their vehicle

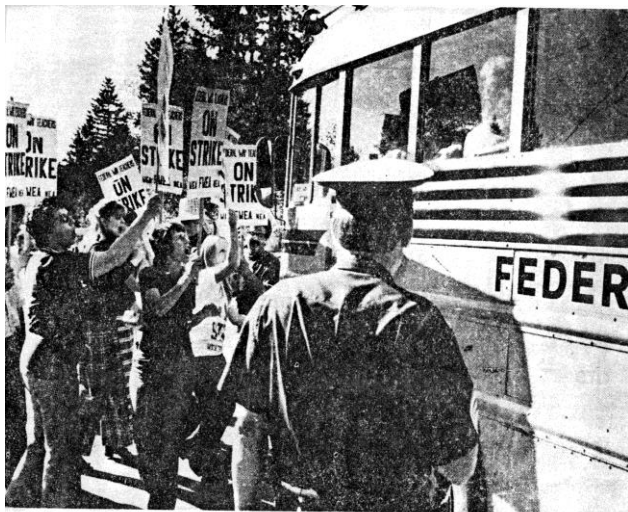
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<sup>36</sup> Constantine Angelos. “Teacher Strikes Back in Mediation.” *Seattle Times*, September 13, 1974, Sec E, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Comstock to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 11, 2013.

through the mobs of shouting picketers who usually surrounded their vehicles on school parking lots.<sup>38</sup>

It appeared that substitute teachers sometimes preferred to avoid confronting the picketers. Ostlund reported the story, apparently told to him by a Seattle newspaper photographer, of a female substitute assigned to Lake Dolloff Elementary. This woman parked several blocks from the school, trekked through woods and climbed through the back yards of several private homes, all in order to enter the school through a back entrance and avoid the angry picketers in the parking lot.<sup>39</sup>



#### Unpopular 'bussing' in Federal Way

Striking Federal Way School District teachers shouted at substitute teachers aboard a school bus yesterday after classes at Kilo Junior High School near Auburn. Tensions have flared at some schools as teachers have attempted to convince substitutes and others not to cross the teacher picket lines. Federal Way schools continued to operate today with administrators, non-striking teachers and substitutes. —Staff photo by Pete Liddell. (Detail, E 5)

9-13-74

Figure 5 - Striking teachers shout at strikebreaking teachers as they exit school grounds via bus at the end of the school day at Kilo Junior High. (Courtesy *Seattle Times*.)

<sup>38</sup> “Complaints Turned Over to Attorney.” FWEA Archives: Box: FWEA Negotiations:1974-75. “1974 Strike” Packet. Folder: “Affidavits.”

<sup>39</sup> Ostlund. “‘Scab, Scab, Scab’ Greeting for Substitutes,” Sec 1, 13.



1974



Dallas Chestnut, a Federal Way teacher, rode a short distance on the hood of a car driven by a substitute teacher as it left a parking lot at Federal Way High School yesterday. Chestnut, a business teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School, slid onto the car as the vehicle moved slowly through picket lines.—Staff photo by Jerry Gay.

## Talks go on in teachers' strikes

Negotiations with federal mediators continued today in both the Federal Way and Tacoma teacher strikes.

Federal Way talks broke

off last night about midnight and were to resume today. Rol Malan, School Board president, reported a "moderate amount of progress" was made.

The Federal Way teachers have been on strike since August 29. The Federal Way Education Association has been asking for a 10.5 per cent salary in-

crease. The board has offered 5 per cent.

In Tacoma, where schools have been closed since September 4, the Tacoma Alliance of Educators and the

Tacoma Association Classroom Teachers asking for a 15 per cent raise. The school board there has offered a maximum increase of 7.75 per cent.

**Figure 6 - Federal Way High School teacher Dallas Chestnut rides on the hood of a strikebreaker's car as it makes its way through picketers in the school's parking lot. (Courtesy Seattle Times.)**





### *Striking teachers at Federal Way*

Three striking Federal Way High School teachers shouted through car windows at a substitute teacher who was driving his car from a parking lot near the school yesterday. The substitute teachers were being bussed from the lots to the schools and back. Federal Way teachers have been on strike since August 29 in a contract-salary dispute.—Staff photo by Jerry Gay. (Details and another photo, A 3.)

**Figure 7 - Striking teachers berate a strikebreaking teacher in the parking lot of Federal Way High School. (Courtesy Seattle Times.)**

### *Militant Teachers Spread Enthusiasm Among Their Colleagues*

As implied above, the most militant teachers—the vanguard of the strike—appeared to be concentrated at Kilo Junior High and Thomas Jefferson (TJ) High School. Striking teacher Lee Ann Prielipp remembers that FWEA members from these schools spread out among the district’s elementary schools to help organize picket lines and help the teachers there “understand the importance of being unified” as part of a striking organization (the FWEA). One school the teachers targeted was Panther Lake Elementary where Prielipp remembers “some of the older, veteran teachers were hesitant to strike.” Prielipp remembers believing that an indication that strike support had made substantial inroads at Panther Lake was that the school’s kindergarten teacher, Florence Loucks, held an orientation for new kindergarten students and their parents outside the school on a sidewalk where they would not cross the picket line.<sup>40</sup>

### *Tail-a-Scab*

As they tried to maintain unity amongst themselves, Federal Way teachers also used tactics to try to discourage substitute teachers from strikebreaking that went beyond confrontations on picket lines. Through the WEA’s Uniserv division, a “tail-a-scab” campaign was implemented in Federal Way. The WEA’s Steve Kink and John Cahill remembered that a pilot program for this campaign was first launched to deal with the strikebreaking teachers at

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<sup>40</sup> Lee Ann Prielipp to the author, E-mail Communication, November 11, 2013. Le Ann Prielipp to the author, E-mail Communication, November 13, 2013.

Kilo Junior High and Thomas Jefferson High School. Then the campaign expanded to other Federal Way schools.<sup>41</sup> They described “tail-a-scab” in Federal Way:

[Striking] teachers [in motor vehicles] would follow the scabs home and try to convince them not to return to school the next day. The campaign disrupted the district’s attempts to recruit scabs, and it demonstrated that teachers would not stand passively by while strikebreakers took their jobs.<sup>42</sup>

Kink and Cahill remembered that there was considerable bitterness among the striking teachers towards their colleagues, fellow regular teachers, who refused to join the strike. The “hard feelings” this created post-strike among the striking teachers and non-striking teachers caused other Washington State school districts “to question the ultimate value of employing scabs.” Michael Comstock remembers at least one case, Olympic View Elementary, where the majority of the regular teachers at the school crossed the picket line. In such a case, striking teachers were advised by their non-striking colleagues to keep their thoughts to themselves or seek employment elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

The “tail a scab” campaign also appeared to involve the collection of information about the strikebreaking teachers. The FWEA gave striking teachers a document entitled “Project Scab Identification” which guided teachers who tailed strikebreakers on their way home. The tailing teachers were directed to operate in two cars with a “driver and observer” in each. They were directed to collect as much information about the strikebreaking teachers as possible and produce a report on each replacement teacher. They were warned that “you can anticipate that the scab will use all kinds of stalling tactics on his way home therefore patience and

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<sup>41</sup> Kink & Cahill, *Class Wars*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Kink & Cahill. *Class Wars*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Kink & Cahill. *Class Wars*, 75. Michael Comstock to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 11, 2013.

determination are necessary.” Finally, the document advised participants in the program to bring a brown bag meal with them because the tailing operation “may be a long trip.” It appears the FWEA wished to collect information on the strikebreaking teachers for purposes of sharing information with neighboring teachers associations and for general blacklisting purposes.<sup>44</sup>

### *Substitutes in the Classroom*

While subjected to unrelenting hostility from the striking teachers, the substitutes, of course, conducted classes. How effective their level of instruction was is unclear. On September 11, the second day of classes, the *Federal Way News* reported. “The students...claimed even though the actual operation of school was near normal, the classes were unorganized but under control.” Meanwhile an FWEA document on September 11 cited reports that, under the substitutes’ watch, the schools were in anarchy: students were hazing each other, destroying property and displaying a general lack of discipline.<sup>45</sup>

### *Teachers and the Federal Way community*

There appears to be no evidence to accurately gauge the Federal Way Community’s reaction to the strike. To judge by the “Letters to the Editor” section of the *Federal Way News*, there was some hostility toward the teachers. Striking teacher Lee Ann Prielipp remembers feeling that the *Federal Way News*—the community’s only newspaper at the time--was hostile toward the teachers and implies that local businesses were hostile as well. However if there

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<sup>44</sup> “Project Scab Identification.” FWEA archives; Box: FWEA Negotiations 1974-75, “1974 Strike” packet, File: Copies: Strike Material.

<sup>45</sup> Bill Ostlund, Jim Keck and Jim Shahan. “School Bells Ring Despite Strike: WEA Rejects Board Offer by 92 percent,” Sec 1,1. “Update 9/11.” Box: FWEA negotiations 1974-75. Packet: 1974 Strike. Folder: Copies: Strike Materials.



was hostility, there was evidence of support as well. For example, a letter to *the Federal Way News* signed by 227 parents of Federal Way school children urged support for the teachers and attacked the “the lack of credibility” of the district administration. The parents declared they would not send their children to school “until the regularly contracted teachers are in the classroom.” They further stated the belief that “appropriate educational experiences” were not possible during the strike, what with classrooms staffed by “substitutes and baby sitters.”<sup>46</sup>

Prielipp (future president of the FWEA as well as the Washington Education Association) remembered that community members showed support for the teachers by providing food on the picket line. She also remembered that neighbors near schools offered their homes as “resting places” for picketers.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the extent of community support for the strike, by September 17 it was over. But the terms of the settlement were overshadowed by the charges made by the majority of the school board members and their community allies that the settlement had been obtained by blackmail on the part of the FWEA.

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<sup>46</sup> “227 Parents Urge Board to Compromise.” *Federal Way News*, September 11, 1974, Sec 1, 2. LeAnn Prielipp to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 21, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Lee Ann Prielipp to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 21, 2013.

## Chapter 5: The Strike Settlement and Aftermath

In the *Federal Way News* of September 25, school board president Rol Malan and board member Richard Schoon wrote the following: “The community we represent has just been made the victim of legal extortion.” Schoon and Malan applied the words “legal extortion” as well as “concerted blackmail” to the strike settlement reached on September 17 between the school board and the FWEA. Schoon and Malan claimed that the board was forced to settle on terms friendly to the FWEA after the teachers union threatened violence. The FWEA heatedly denied the charges. Charges of threats of violence to force a strike settlement as well as thuggish behavior by teachers during the strike quickly overshadowed the strike settlement terms. The uproar in Federal Way over the teachers’ allegedly thuggish behavior was loud but brief. Only five teachers were charged with a crime during the strike, all of whom all acquitted. However certain school board members and their allies in the community claimed that the King County Sherriff’s department let striking teachers get away with crimes committed during the strike because of a “hands off” policy.<sup>48</sup>

The uproar began with the strike settlement of September 17. By late morning that day an estimated 400 (of roughly 900) FWEA members had gathered at Federal Way’s Steel Lake Park. The teachers at the park planned to march on the district’s school bus yard if they received word that no strike settlement had been reached. Earlier that morning teachers had

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<sup>48</sup> Schoon & Malan. “Board Officials Relate Negotiation Problems,” Sec 1, 1.

formed a human blockade in front of the district's bus yard in order to prevent the busses from leaving. Now teachers planned to resume that activity in the afternoon if FWEA negotiators informed them that no settlement had been reached. An official of the Washington Education Association (WEA) at the park told Jim Shahan that "we will do what we have to do to prevent the busses from leaving." However, word soon reached the park that a strike settlement had been reached, with the teachers receiving an 8.5 percent salary increase; this was close to the original 10.5 percent demand of the FWEA and substantially distant from the board's original 4.8 percent offer. The settlement also promised the teachers increased funding for reduced class sizes (pending voter approval in a future levy election); greater district payments for teachers' health insurance; and gave teachers a greater voice in controlling the overall teaching of their classes and selection of teaching materials. After the settlement's announcement, the march on the bus yard was called off.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 8 - FWEA president Patrick Dunham, far right with microphone, addresses striking teachers at Federal Way's Steel Lake Park, September 17, 1974. (Courtesy *Federal Way News*.)

<sup>49</sup> Jim Shahan. "Board Folds after Threats of Violence: Teachers Go Back to Work with 8.5 percent Pay Hike," *Federal Way News*, September 18, 1974. Sec 1, 1. . Constantine Angelos. "Federal Way Teachers Ok Pact." *Seattle Times*, September 18, 1974, Sec A, 10.

### *The Settlement: Extortion or Reasonable Compromise?*

According to Malan and Schoon, a mediator from the federal government’s mediation and conciliation service--after observing the mood of the teachers at the park-- informed the school board that a “potentially explosive situation” existed in Federal Way. The teachers at Steel Lake Park, as they prepared to march to the district bus yard to resume their blockade, “appeared intent on violence,” according to Malan and Schoon. Schoon and Malan cited the federal mediator, unidentified newspaper reports and unidentified school board “intelligence sources” at the park as proof that the teachers were about to engage in violence. They did not elaborate on what specific violence the teachers were about to commit though it seems probable that they had in mind the possibility that the teachers would assault bus drivers and damage busses. They also claimed that WEA officials at the park stirred up teacher rowdiness by making speeches that provided a distorted picture as to what was occurring in negotiations between the board and FWEA. They claimed that in the end, in order to stave off teacher violence, the board was forced to “accept a financially unsound” settlement—seemingly a reference to the 8.5 percent salary hike—in order to preserve property and lives within the district and the community at large.<sup>50</sup>

Jim Shahan appeared to accept Malan’s and Schoon’s version of events in his description of the strike settlement:

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<sup>50</sup> Schoon & Malan. “Board Officials Relate Negotiation Problems,” Sec 1, 2.

Tentative agreement was reached shortly before noon Tuesday [September 17] after the school board and district negotiators were alerted to a pending violent confrontation between striking teachers and non-striking bus drivers at the district's bus garage.<sup>51</sup>

The strongest evidence backing the notion that the teachers intended violence at the bus yard was a *Seattle Times* quotation of FWEA President Patrick Dunham. A September 23 *Times* article quoted Dunham as saying that he had called the meeting at Steel Lake Park partly to “cool down” a tense atmosphere because “that morning there had been some discussion of violence among teachers.” The quote did not conclusively prove that the teachers intended to commit violence at the bus yard but it suggested that violence, of an unspecified nature, was not completely absent from the minds of teachers.<sup>52</sup>

However Dunham's general public stance was that the charges against teachers were unjustified—referring both to the claim that the teachers obtained their settlement through the threat of violence at the bus yard as well as the claim that thuggish teacher behavior on the picket line during the strike was frequent. Writing in the *Federal Way News* on October 2, Dunham called the charges about teacher threats of violence “hogwash.” He insisted that the settlement was the result of reasonable compromise by both sides, including “significant concessions” made by the FWEA. He further stated that any suggestion by the school board of widespread rowdy or inappropriate behavior by teachers on the picket line was based on “overgeneralization of the few incidents we all know did occur.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Shahan. “Board Folds After Threats of Violence,” Sec 1, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Constantine Angelos. “Federal Way Board Says ‘Blackmail.’” *Seattle Times*, September 23, 1974. Sec A, 9

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Dunham. “News Readers Speak Out: FWEA Answers Board Charges.” *Federal Way News*, October 2, 1974. Sec 1, 2.

Dunham implied that if there was any danger of teacher violence during the strike, it was the fault of the school district and its decision to use substitute teachers as strike breakers:

Certainly emotions were running high. The school board knew that. After all they were the ones who brought in 500 scabs (according to their own count). They knew full well—from the beginning—the potential for disruption they had created. Perhaps their own sense of guilt at having created a monster of a situation heightened their paranoia.<sup>54</sup>

Dunham described the charges about threats of violence as evidence that members of the school board were “paranoid and out of touch with reality.”<sup>55</sup>

Dunham’s reference to school board “paranoia” was also possibly partly related to the claims made by school board members Richard Schoon and Vera Fredrickson that threatening phone calls were made to their private residences towards the end of the strike. Schoon and Fredrickson made these claims at the first school board meeting after the strike settlement. The implication was that the FWEA or their supporters had been behind the calls. It was possible that the implication was true though there was no evidence to prove this or that the calls had even been made in the first place. Schoon claimed that the calls had been made while he was away from home helping the board with strike negotiations. He alleged that his wife received the threatening calls and was so frightened she and their children temporarily fled their home. Fredrickson claimed that an anonymous caller warned “We’re going to get you.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dunham. “Newsreaders Speak Out:FWEA Answers Board Charges,” Sec 1, 2. .

<sup>55</sup> Dunham. “Newsreaders Speak Out:FWEA Answers Board Charges,” Sec 1, 2.

<sup>56</sup> “Investigation Requested by Parents: Board Ok’s Contract Despite Protests.” *Federal Way News*, September 25, 1974, Sec 1, 1.

### *The Strike and King County Authorities*

Fredrickson was perhaps the most hard-line of the five board members in her views toward the FWEA. She led a delegation of Federal Way parents to a King County Council meeting after the strike. One of the parents, Carol Weymiller-- her voice showing “the strain of emotion” according to *Federal Way News* reporter Darlene Himmelspach—told the council of “atrocities” committed by picketing teachers during the strike. “Laws were broken, crimes committed, civil rights abused” by the teachers, she alleged. She also claimed that the King County sheriff’s department had a “hands off” policy towards teacher abuses during the strike. Fredrickson and the parents demanded the council launch a grand jury investigation into teacher conduct during the strike. They were informed that the council had no authority to do this. Fredrickson claimed that an unidentified source within the sheriff’s department informed her that the department’s resources were such that it was “completely incapable of handling the massive violence” allegedly threatened by the teachers on September 17<sup>th</sup>. She upbraided Federal Way’s two representatives on the council—Dave Mooney and Paul Barden—for what she thought was a blithe attitude towards the alleged thuggish behavior of the FWEA. She pointed to possible strikes by teachers in other King County districts that were then thought to occur later in the school year. She implied that the alleged outrages committed by Federal Way teachers would be replicated in those districts and warned the council: “You may not be so smug in your ivory tower when it gets closer to home.” In the end, the council agreed to order the King County Prosecutor’s Office and the King County Department of Public Safety (sheriff’s

department) to produce a report on the Federal Way teachers strike. I've been unable to locate a copy of this report, if one was ever prepared.<sup>57</sup>

The Fredrickson group charged that King County Sherriff's deputies were negligent in preventing abuses by picketing teachers during the strike. In response, King County Director of Public Safety (Sherriff) Laurence Waldt produced a written report. He conceded that deputies may have missed illegal actions by teachers as they were attempting to maintain order in front of schools where pickets marched. He stated that teachers engaged in harassment of substitute teachers and of parents transporting their kids to school (how frequently he appeared not to estimate). The shouting by teachers at persons crossing the picket line sometimes degenerated into actions like spitting on strikebreakers' cars or, in one case, the surrounding of a car and rocking it. He claimed that senior King County officials had neglected to provide his department with firm guidance or court orders on what authority his officers had to intervene during the strike. He wrote that his officers may have been uncertain as to how to act during what was a typical occurrence during the strike: teachers placing themselves in front of a strikebreaker's car as it entered the school parking lot and then very slowly dispersing to allow the car to proceed. According to Waldt, officers may have been unsure as to when this activity crossed the line into the legal definition of criminal obstruction. Overall Waldt praised his department's conduct during the strike: he claimed that his deputies' maintenance of order allowed for no school days to be missed; for school attendance to average 62 percent of expected; and for no extra-curricular activities to be seriously curtailed. He claimed that some persons claiming after

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<sup>57</sup> Darlene Himmelpach. "Police Error Charged in Federal Way Strike Violence." *Federal Way News*, September 25, 1974. Sec 1, 1. Angelos, "Federal Way Board Says 'Blackmail,'" Sec A, 9.



the strike to have been victims of teacher crimes during the strike had refused to press charges or cooperate with his investigators. He told the council that no reports had come into his office about threats—presumably referring to the alleged phone calls made to Schoon and Fredrickson. There is no known evidence that the charges against the FWEA were dishonest though there was also no evidence to prove that they were not exaggerated. Perhaps the FWEA read into the Waldt report support for the idea that claims of thuggish behavior against it were politically motivated and not legitimate.<sup>58</sup>

### *The Incident at Kilo Junior High*

Five striking teachers were indicted for misdemeanor strike-related crimes, all related to a single incident at Kilo Junior High. A Federal Way woman, Patricia Moore, held the five teachers responsible for \$250 in damage to her vehicle, scratches and dents as well as finger nail polish stains. She claimed that near the school's entrance, a vehicle deliberately drove in front of her to block her path and trap her so as to allow a mob of teachers the opportunity to assault her vehicle with fists and picket signs. The teachers' defense was that only two of the defendants used fists to pound her vehicle in protest because they alleged she travelled into the parking lot at an excess rate of speed for a school zone. The teachers also claimed that the other three defendants were near Moore's vehicle for too little an amount of time required to inflict the damage supposedly caused by them. They claimed that sheriff's deputies standing nearby quickly arrived on the scene to quell the disturbance before it reached the level of violence claimed by Moore. Witnesses corroborated the story and a judge dismissed the

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<sup>58</sup> "Waldt Report cites Poor Communication." *Federal Way News*, October 2 1974. Sec 1, 1, Himmelspach. "Police Error Charged in Federal Way Strike Violence," Sec 1, 1.

charges for lack of evidence. The acquitted five were the only teachers arrested during the strike.<sup>59</sup>

The school board took virtually no action with regard to the alleged criminal behavior of teachers during the strike. Seemingly as an effort to move on from the strike and in spite of the extortion charges, all board members except Vera Fredrickson voted in favor the contract. Fredrickson's colleagues rejected her proposal that, in light of the charge that the board accepted the settlement under threat of violence, the contract be submitted to Federal Way voters as a referendum. All board members except Fredrickson and James Hickman, a relatively low key conservative board member regarded by the FWEA as an unfriendly actor in the mold of Fredrickson, approved an amnesty for any teachers involved in inappropriate behavior during the strike. The vote against the amnesty agreement may have been motivated partly by hostility to the FWEA; it also may have been based on the feeling that the agreement should have protected from repercussions students who were kept home by parents during the strike.<sup>60</sup>

The strike was over and the district and teachers appeared to more or less move on. The issue of teacher conduct during the strike seemed to rapidly wither away; instead in the following months and years the district became consumed by acute financial crisis.

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<sup>59</sup> "Kilo Teachers Acquitted From Conduct Charge." *Federal Way News*, January 29 1975. Sec 2, 16.

<sup>60</sup> "For Media Information: Who's Who in Federal Way Education Crisis." Federal Way School Board. Meeting Minutes, September 23, 1974, 3-5. Federal Way School Board archives. "Investigation Requested by Parents: Board Ok's Contract Despite Protests," Sec 1, 1.

## Epilogue

Richard Schoon's and Rol Malan's letter to the *Federal Way News* of September 25—quoted throughout this paper—was also sent to Washington Governor Dan Evans, state Attorney General Slade Gorton, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Buster Brouillet, Washington State's two US senators and six of its congressmen. The letter advised—pointing to FWEA conduct during the strike—that the activities of NEA affiliates needed investigation and legal curtailment by state and federal authorities. However no such measures were forthcoming. In the coming months and years the Federal Way School District was consumed completely by crisis, mostly of the financial kind.<sup>61</sup>

In February 1975 there was turmoil as Superintendent Cochran was forced to resign, effective June 1975. It appeared that, earlier in his reign as superintendent, Cochran alienated board president Rol Malan by releasing information to the *Federal Way News* before providing it to the school board. Malan, along with James Kenney, were two of the board members opposed (against three in favor) to Cochran's hiring in May 1972. Malan appeared less than eager to see Cochran remain in his post. All board members except Vera Fredrickson, Cochran's strongest supporter amongst the five, agreed to accept the board's resignation agreement with the Superintendent (which included a severance payment). Strong Cochran supporter and community activist Dennis Hudlicky attributed to board members James Kenney and Richard Schoon the leadership in the effort to force out Cochran. Hudlicky told the *Federal Way News* that he would retaliate against Schoon and Kenney by leading a campaign to force a recall

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<sup>61</sup> Schoon & Malan. "Board Officials Relate Negotiation Problems," Sec 1, 1.

election against them. Schoon and Kenney were politically dead-meat according to Hudlicky: he assured the *Federal Way News* that the two men were already “hanging from meat-hooks,” not literally but politically speaking. However Hudlicky’s bombast did not bear fruit as no recall election ever took place targeting the two men.<sup>62</sup>

More serious than turmoil among personnel was the district’s financial crisis. Assistant superintendant Vic Heinlen assumed the superintendant’s position—replacing Cochran after the 1974-75 school year--near the beginning of a financial crisis for Federal Way schools that lasted for years. Financial crisis wracked many Washington State school districts in the 1970’s but Federal Way may have had the most severe problems. Establishing a state record from September 1973 to June 1980, Federal Way voters rejected 22 consecutive school funding levy ballot measures. The district had great trouble overcoming the 60 percent passage requirement for school levy elections in Washington State. Several times during the rejection streak voters supported the levies with approval rates around 57 percent (and even 59 percent) but were unable to surpass the supermajority requirement. The results for Federal Way schools were drastic. The number of classes for each student was cut, new textbook purchases were put off and the district struggled to avoid layoffs. The Washington State government, believing that the district was failing to provide students with a minimum level of education, withdrew accreditation from all the district’s junior highs and threatened to do so for its high schools. Two elementary schools were closed. Federal Way voters gained national attention during this crisis: for example newspapers in South Carolina and Florida carried an Associated Press story

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<sup>62</sup> “Cochran Quits Under Pressure.” *Federal Way News*, February 5, 1975. Sec 1, 1. Jim Shahan “Cochran Resignation: He Never Had a Chance.” *Federal Way News*, February 5, 1975. Sec 1, 2.

about Federal Way's revolt against property taxes. An exasperated Vic Heinlen resigned as superintendent at the end of the 1978-79 school year.<sup>63</sup>

Organizing a major grassroots effort in opposing Federal Way's school levies in the 1970's was the Save Your Homes Committee and its president, the conservative activist and Boeing engineer John Pancratz. Pancratz may have initially been concerned about district spending levels but by the late 70's his publicly stated focus was on non-fiscal matters. In a 1978 interview with the *Auburn Globe News*, he stated three conditions to end his personal opposition to Federal Way school levies. The three were: the ending of open concept education—where two teachers taught sixty or seventy students in the same classroom; the elimination of unspecified morally offensive material in textbooks; and the elimination of lax discipline in the schools. Pancratz also claimed that some members of his organization were motivated by a continuing resentment against the 1974 teachers strike.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>. "FW School Chief Laments Levy Loss." *Tacoma News Tribune*, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1976. John Bailey. "FW Levy Defeat Means Layoffs, Cutbacks." *Tacoma News Tribune*, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1977. Jim Shahan. "Activities in Schools Aren't Dead Yet." *Federal Way News*, May 25 1977. Sec 1, 1. Marlowe Churchill. "Federal Way Schools OK Plan to Fund Sports." *Tacoma News Tribune*, June 21 1977. "FW Delays Ruling on Funding." *Tacoma News Tribune*, June 21 1977. Jack Pyle. "FW School Climate May Be Better." *Tacoma News Tribune*, October 31 1977 (Page Number not found). "Federal Way Voters Have Known How to Say No to Taxes for Years." *Spartanburg Herald Journal* January 11, 1979. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=OOEsAAAAIBAJ&sjid=v80EAAAAIBAJ&pg=6007,1765714&dq=federal+way+school+board+levy+election&hl=en>) Accessed March 9 2013. Sec A, 2. "Tax Revolt Arrived 'Early' in Federal Way Wash." *Spokesman Herald Review*. January 11 1979. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=eDxOAAAAIBAJ&sjid=9e0DAAAAIBAJ&pg=7332,4107337&dq=federal+way+school+board+levy+election&hl=en>) Accessed March 9 2013. Sec 1, 12. "Towns Lifestyle is Taxing." *Palm Beach Post*. January 11 1979. (<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=OOEsAAAAIBAJ&sjid=v80EAAAAIBAJ&pg=6007,1765714&dq=federal+way+school+board+levy+election&hl=en>) Accessed March 9 2013. P 1. Cathy Stone. "Federal Way Levy: It Pays to Try, Try, Again." *Federal Way News*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 1980. Sec 1, 1.

<sup>64</sup> "Pancratz Heads Informal Group Who Oppose Way Schools Run." *Auburn Globe News*, August 11, 1978, Sec 1, 1.

## Conclusion

In the 1970's, Federal Way was at the forefront of important changes in education in Washington State and the nation. In 1974, Federal Way experienced one of the first teachers strikes in Washington State history and the first strike in King County's history. As Michael Comstock notes, the strike helped spur Washington State public school labor relations away from the absolute dominance of school boards and gave teachers a more substantial voice in their conditions of work. Federal Way teachers succeeded in their strike in spite of immense obstacles, including the widespread feeling among legal authorities and politicians at the time that teachers' strikes in Washington State were illegal.<sup>65</sup>

An example of the increased voice gained by Federal Way teachers is illustrated by Lee Ann Prielipp who, at the time of the strike, was employed at Panther Lake Elementary as a reading specialist. She remembers when she applied for a position at Kilo Junior High in the month after the strike, the principal told her that the job was hers unless the school's faculty objected. Kilo's faculty would not accept new hires who were not strong FWEA members. Prielipp, of course, was a strong FWEA member and was accepted to teach at the junior high, where she spent the rest of her teaching career before her election as president of the Washington Education Association. The incident illustrates the seemingly decisive influence that teachers had gained in hiring new teachers; before the strike it was likely that the principal and other administrators would have virtual complete control over hiring.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Comstock to Tia Hendrix, E-mail Communication, June 11, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Lee Ann Prielipp to the author, E-mail Communication, November 10, 2013. Lee Ann Prielipp to the author, Email Communication, November 16, 2013.

As for the charges of violence and intimidation against the teachers, there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that more than a relative handful of striking teachers engaged in vandalism. It is possible that at least some of the vandalism against the vehicles of people crossing the picket line were not the fault of teachers but of persons not associated with the FWEA. As noted in this paper, the only teachers arrested during the strike were found not guilty. It may have been true, as Carol Weymiller, Vera Fredrickson and others argued, that the arrest tallies were so low because the King County Sherriff's office pursued a "hands off" policy toward striking teachers. However I have been unable to find evidence to support this charge.

The Federal Way teachers strike helped normalize teachers' strikes in Washington State. The charges of violence and intimidation launched by the teachers' enemies during the strike did not derail that fact.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Barbara Barney, Dick Caster and Bert Ross of the Historical Society of Federal Way. Barbara made copies of many of the *Federal Way News* articles quoted in this paper and scanned the pictures used in it; Dick and Bert proof read rough drafts and made good suggestions.

I would also like to thank Tia Hendrix, office manager at the Federal Way Education Association (FWEA) and Chris Popich, Federal Way School Board administrative assistant, for taking time out of their busy schedules to help me procure archival material. I would also like to thank Ms Hendrix in particular for arranging the reading of drafts of this paper by former FWEA presidents Mike Comstock, Lee Ann Prielipp and Jan Bieber. I would like to thank these three for reading the paper and Comstock and Prielipp for providing the reminiscences quoted in it and catching several grammatical errors in the paper's final draft. Finally I would like to thank my father Gene Green for showing me how to insert text boxes in Microsoft Word documents.

While these people contributed greatly to the completion of this paper, any errors in fact or interpretation of evidence in it are entirely my responsibility.