

**Presentation to Toronto Catholic School Board Trustees**  
**Thursday, October 8, 1998**

Colleagues:

It is with some hesitation that I address you with such a term of collegiality. My Catholic education has taught me to be gentle and non-judgemental, to see, as Graham Greene states in *The Power and the Glory*, "with the eyes of a saint." And so I call you colleagues. But I must admit, your actions with respect to our Secondary Schools, our secondary teachers and our high school students make it hard for me to be Christlike. Good St. Jude, help me!

I address you this evening from three perspectives: parent; teacher and TSU Recording Secretary.

When you, Trustees, in your wisdom, voted to lock out your teachers on the Thursday before Labour Day - you also locked out the students, including three of my children. Other Catholic Boards opened their schools and allowed their students to receive most of their subjects, and in many cases all of their subjects. My children got nothing. Even when the mediator managed to hammer out an arrangement that would get the teachers and the students back into the schools - an arrangement, by the way, that was signed by all members of both bargaining teams, you found a constitutional rule to hide behind, and you kept the schools closed. And my children, and the other high school students in our Board continued to get nothing.

And even when your electorate, the parents, pleaded with you to get the kids back in school, you continued to delay, and delay, only lifting the lockout when it appeared certain that back to work legislation would be passed, and even then you included a time-rider of midnight.

I always expected better. I thought that you felt tremendous loss, like I did, when this government, with a stroke of the pen, declared the MSSB dead and gone - even though our Board was not merging with any other boards. From its ashes rose the Toronto District 40 Catholic School Board - the government's name, not the Catholic Community's - despite what the BNA Act might say. And as I look at this District 40 Board I realize it is a mere shadow of its former self: trustees have been reduced by half and are paid a pittance; a number of you have stated that you have full time jobs and do not have the time to come into the high schools and see what devastation 7 out of 8 is causing to these communities; so called equal funding has led to massive employee layoffs and buy-out packages; there are increased workloads for all; and high schools are empty shells of what they once were. I remember that the old Board - the MSSB - prided itself on never laying off an employee. And my children, now back at school, thanks to government intervention, receive far less than they received last year. They can't wait for next year, or the year after to sort things out. These are their high-school years, and they won't get them back - and the only action they see from you is a letter to the Premier asking him to legislate the teachers you locked out back to work. They do understand irony. They also study history and know well what happened to the Catholic Schools in Newfoundland.

One of you challenged the parents to let you know what they wanted to cut so that the

Board could continue to staff its high schools on a 6 out of 8 teaching model. Textbooks would be a good start - especially at the government's inflated prices. We've struggled and made do in the past with inadequate textbook budgets: we can do so again when the choice is either texts or teachers; Computers and technology? We can do with less if more means fewer teachers. Cut everything else before you look at cutting your most valuable resource - your employees.

My children need their teachers, and all the gifts those teachers bring - their expertise as coaches, mentors, yearbook publishers, newspaper producers, debate moderators, prom organizers, dance supervisors, talent night producers, play directors, field trip organizers, innumerable club moderators, understanding and patient advisors, confidants, friends. Seven out of eight eliminates all these freely and gladly given gifts and replaces them with exhaustion, loss of patience, frustration, burn-out, and helplessness. Seven out of eight will sound the death knell of our Catholic High Schools as surely as Bill 160 tolled the death of the MSSB.

But before Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, ascends the bell tower, your electorate and your students have a right to know who among you voted to lock the schools. As public officials you are accountable to the people you serve. This is a vote that should never have been held in private session. You were asked this question at your own public forum, but declined the dance. I call upon your integrity now, tonight, around this horseshoe - both your collective and individual integrity - to tell us how you voted that Thursday before Labour Day. Why? Because by taking responsibility for your action we will at least see that our trustees have the courage of their convictions, that they are willing to defend their position in public, that they will not hide behind bylaws and private sessions.

Trustees, would those among you who voted against locking the schools, please stand.

Seeing none standing, one must assume that you were all of one collective mind in locking the schools. Did you not notice that Quasimodo had hesitated there for a moment, it was as if he understood the importance of this moment; but he has now started up the stairs. It won't be long before he reaches the bells and the tune he'll ring will be a doleful one. We may as well conduct the last rites now for Catholic District School Board 40 - for the corpse begins to stink.

Jim Barnes