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Judge Hears Teachers' Complaints

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The Archdiocese of New York sat down with the striking teachers at 10 Catholic high schools yesterday, but this time it was before a judge.

On the fourth day of the strike, the Lay Faculty Association brought the archdiocese before the state Employment Relations Board to answer charges that the archdiocese has not been negotiating with the union "in good faith."

The hearing was held before an administrative law judge, Sidney Altner, at the Employment Relations Board's midtown Manhattan offices.

Before the hearing, the union held a rally in front of the building on 34th Street. About 100 people listened to speeches by union leaders, including Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers, made noise and carried picket-signs with messages such as "Catholic Teachers Deserve a Living Wage."

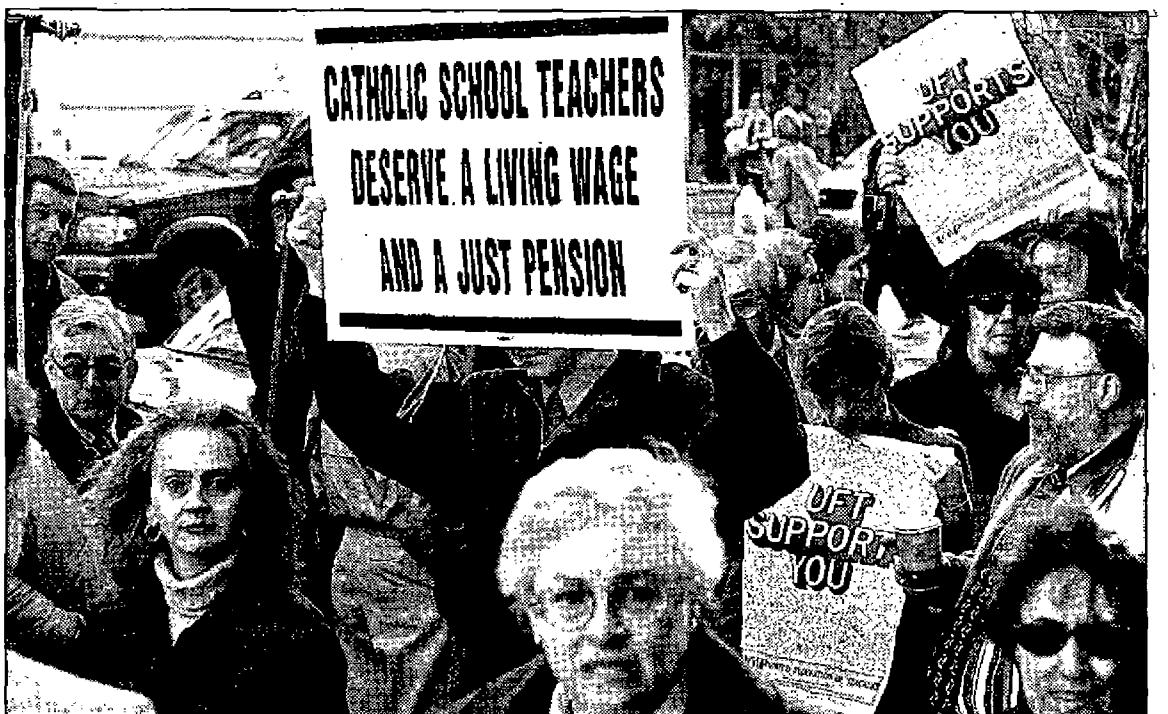
Most of the 10 schools affected by the strike dismissed students early once again yesterday, according to Joseph Zwilling, spokesman for the archdiocese.

In three hours of testimony before the administrative law judge, Henry Kielkucki, business manager for the union, which represents about 450 teachers, described how the archdiocese failed to respond to the union's many attempts to initiate contract negotiations.

Kielkucki testified that the union gave 11 different proposals to the archdiocese, but the archdiocese only made one change in its counterproposal.

In addition to salary, the primary sticking point between the two sides is the union's insistence that the archdiocese put the teachers into a second pension plan that would allow them to receive a higher income upon retirement. The archdiocese refuses, claiming it would cost more money, but the union says the teachers would provide any additional funds required — even postage.

"Many teachers are leaving the system because the pension is so low that they have to get other jobs" when they retire, Kielkucki told the judge. "You can't retire on a diocesan pension."



Newsday Photo / Alan Raia

Teachers on strike at 10 Catholic high schools demonstrate in Manhattan prior to a hearing before a state board.

David Horan, attorney for the archdiocese, said the archdiocese would prefer to be negotiating rather than facing off in a court hearing.

"The CHSA [Catholic High School Association, which represents the archdiocese's interests] is obligated under law to meet and bargain in good faith," Horan said. "It has done so over the 20 years I've been involved and has put forward sincere proposals in good faith. . . . The union chose to call a strike, which has made it very difficult for teachers, students and communities served by the school."

The two sides are scheduled to return to the Employment Relations Board Dec. 13 to complete the hearing. No more contract negotiations have been scheduled.

Any decision by the board is legally binding in a court of law.

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