

# Angry teachers picket trustees

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More than 100 angry Pajaro Valley school district teachers showed up at last night's board meeting carrying picket signs, chanting slogans and demanding a contract from the district.

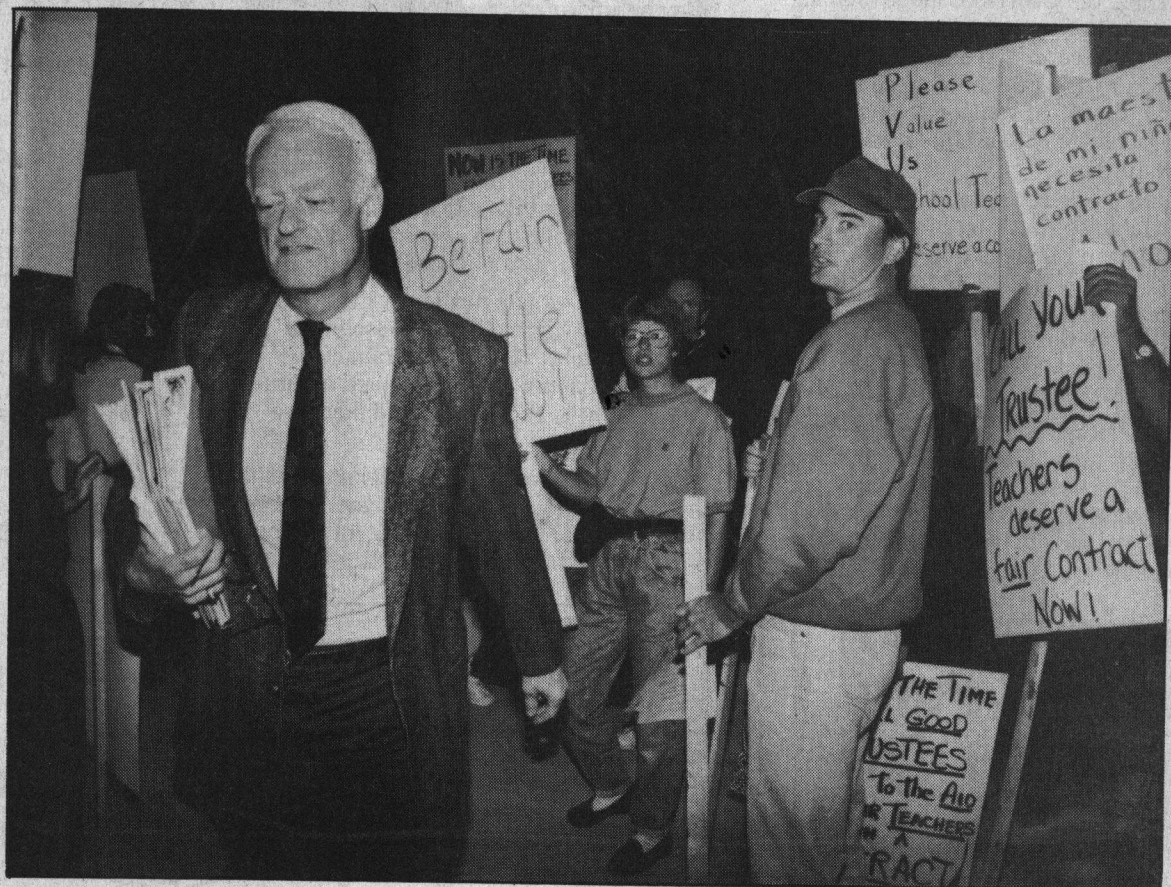
The district's nearly 900 teachers have been working without a contract since June 1990. They did not get a raise last year and this year's budget does not include a cost-of-living adjustment. Union representatives and district officials last month reached an impasse on contract negotiations.

The level of frustration and anger was apparent as teachers pounded sign handles on the ground outside a room where the trustees were holding a closed session before the regular meeting, which was held at Aptos High School.

Once the regular meeting was in session, board members sat quietly for nearly an hour as teacher after teacher stepped up to the lectern and railed against what they thought was the district's insensitivity and indifference to the plight of the teaching staff. The room filled with thunderous applause after speakers made their comments.

Last month, the trustees extended Superintendent Merrill Grant's contract for three years at more than \$90,000 a year. Several teachers commented on his contract, contrasting it with the board's refusal to give similar consideration to teachers.

Watsonville adult school teacher Frank Bardacke had a blunt characterization not only of the board's treatment of Grant's contract renewal as op-



Mike McCollum

**Superintendent Merrill Grant runs gantlet of pickets to enter board meeting room at Aptos High School last night.**

posed to the impasse with the teachers, but also of the disparity between the superintendent's and teachers' salaries: "It's an insult! That's what gets me."

District officials have offered teachers a 3 percent raise for this school year, an offer rejected by the union. Last year, teachers had asked for an 8 percent raise, but that request has been consistently ignored by district officials, said union officials. They said the district has not even made an offer for the

1990-91 school year.

As a protest, the union asked teachers earlier this month to "work to the rule," meaning teachers will not participate in any extracurricular activities, such as serving on school committees.

Union president Rhea DeHart warned the board that if a contract is not hammered out, last night's demonstration would not be the last one the trustees see.

"You've only seen the tip of the iceberg," she said, adding

that the trustees apparently don't appreciate the difficulties of teaching in the classroom. "If you think it's easy to teach in this district, get in those classrooms yourselves."

Earlier this month, district officials and classified (non-teaching) workers' union representatives reached an agreement giving the workers a 3 percent raise. Union members, who had been without a contract for almost a year, ratified the contract but the trustees have yet to approve it.