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Collective Bargaining and the New Status of Education

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Charles Cogen, President

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

At the White House Conference last summer, Sidney Marland, Superintendent of Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, introduced his remarks with the following anecdote: "It is said that George Washington, soon after his ascendancy to the presidency in the early days of our country, sent Gouverneur Morris to France to take a look at Louis XVI and see what kind of a person he was. Gouverneur Morris reported back this message, 'Louis XVI, Mr. President, is a good man, as despots go, but he inherited a revolution'." Superintendent Marland then went on to say, "I think that in 1965, President Johnson has sent John Gardner into the city schools of our land and said, 'What kind of people are the superintendents?' and John Gardner is saying to the President, 'They are good men, as despots go, but they've inherited a revolution'."

Dr. Marland went on to enumerate a number of aspects of this current revolution, and among them he listed "a search for increased influence and autonomy by teachers."

We are, indeed, in the midst of the greatest revolution in the history of education. It is a revolution sparked by a revived teacher union movement and fanned to a flame by the rivalry between the AFT and the NEA. It is a revolution epitomized by the following item in the Wall Street Journal of June 14, 1965. The headline was "Militant Educators", and the first paragraph read: "School teachers--once regarded as 'underachievers' in the labor movement--are rapidly moving to the head of the class in collective bargaining."

This collective bargaining revolution is raising the economic, as well as the professional status of the teacher, to heretofore unknown heights, and is thereby shifting the focus in education back to its proper object, namely, the children in the classroom.

We must face up to the charge of those who seek to delay or prevent the practice of collective bargaining that, allowing teachers to be represented by a strong and militant organization in collective bargaining will bring teacher gains only at the expense of the children. It is my contention, as I have indicated, that the very contrary of this thesis represents the true state of affairs.

As things stand now, throughout the country, except where collective bargaining prevails, teachers, no matter how competent or dedicated, are still constricted by their employment relationship. Decisions concerning their working life are made far distant from the classroom. Boards of education, whether well-meaning or not, decide upon salaries, working conditions, and curricula --not necessarily on the basis of what is best for education, but on what is expedient, economic and politic. In other words, because taxpayers are not always generous, politicians civic-minded, nor board of education members magnanimous, our classes are overcrowded, textbooks scarce, clerical work mountainous, salaries low, and morale lower. Teachers are viewed as budget figures. Class size is a factor of construction, finance, and tax anticipation *warrants*. Preparation periods are considered not necessary because teachers can be hired who will do the extra work at home. In many cases, teachers' salaries are set on the basis of what prevails in surrounding districts--where teachers are also underpaid. Thus, whole sets of communities go down the road to educational mediocrity in happy lockstep.

To affect the conditions under which they work, therefore, teachers must exert influence upon their employer. 50, 100, 3,000, or 10,000 teachers in a school district cannot do this as individuals, but they can do it if they organize. They must organize, and they must organize in a way that is not impeded by obstacles between themselves and their employer. Management, in the person of the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the principal can be just such an obstacle.

When Superintendents and principals form associations and "request" teachers to join, they are injecting themselves into a teacher situation and not removing obstacles between the individual teachers and the school board, but enhancing them.

Uniting effectively as employees can be accomplished only when they are free of management pressures. Traditionally and honestly, this means teachers should form their own organizations--unions. Unions have served all employees seeking organization. Craftsmen have influenced the conditions under which they work by binding together into unions--why not teachers? The men on the assembly line have mitigated the tedious aspects of their toil through their unions--why not teachers? Musicians, newspaper men, radio and television broadcasters, airline pilots, engineers, actors, and even doctors (when they have found themselves as employees) have organized into unions to protect and enhance their professional talents--why not teachers?

We in the American Federation of Teachers have fought for the right of teachers to organize into unions of their own choosing. We are nearly 50 years old, and have over 110,000 members. We have the backing of employees organ-

ized into other unions; they have our backing. Through our union, we can accomplish much for the teaching profession and for education.

As we organize into unions, some basic method must be found by which we can sit down with our employer and discuss the terms and conditions of our work. In other words, teachers acting together as professional employees must find a mechanism by which they can create conditions of work that will enable the individual teacher to really teach. The method, the mechanism, is collective bargaining. It is my intention to demonstrate that unionism and collective bargaining are not only compatible with professionalism, for the best interest of teachers and students alike, but they also provide the best opportunity to make it a reality. I shall shortly cite samples of provisions which typify our recent contracts--in New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Yonkers.

To begin with, there are the indirect and intangible, but nonetheless significant effects of collective bargaining. These come about through the very nature of the collective bargaining relationship as a democratic decision-making process and through the creation of conditions of work, such as the elimination of non-teaching chores, that enable us to teach effectively with self-respect. Then too, there are the direct effects of creating teaching/learning conditions, such as limiting class size, which by their very nature lead to the improvement of teaching.

Indeed, the very existence of a sound collective bargaining contract is calculated to bring about a management-teacher relationship that is conducive to a wholesome learning situation, for collective bargaining has been developed by two centuries of labor relations history as the process of economic democracy. It is this method of operation which enables those who do the major work in the schools to have a significant role in determining the conditions therein. In

short, the partnership concept has begun to operate in the schools. Inherent therein is a basic and revolutionary change in the philosophy and operation of the school system.

The partnership concept is evidenced in many ways in the collective bargaining relationship. Jointly established rules replace arbitrary rules; negotiations replace unilateral decisions. In addition, the consultative process is provided for on a continuous basis. I quote from the preamble to the New York City contract:

"The Board of Education and the Union recognize that they have a joint responsibility beyond their collective bargaining relationship.

The Board of Education and the Union wish to declare their mutual intent to work together toward the achievement of common aims of educational excellence.

"The Board of Education and the Union will strive to achieve a mutually acceptable formulation of general objectives and of long-term educational goals and programs in areas of such mutual concern as the recruitment of well-qualified teachers, the improvement of difficult schools, the reduction of class size, and the development of a more effective curriculum. ...

"Toward this end, they have agreed that the Superintendent of Schools or his representative will meet and consult once a month during the school year with representatives of the Union on matters of educational policy and development.

"It is hoped that this joint effort will contribute in significant measure to the advancement of public education in the City of New York."

Economic Gains

Teachers' salaries come first to mind when discussing their economic status. They not only affect the welfare of the teacher, but they also affect his ability to perform. Obviously, if low salaries force a teacher to "moonlight", his teaching effectiveness will be reduced. The psychological effects of low salaries upon the teacher are even more important than the economic. For instance, if an experienced teacher is paid a relatively low salary, say \$8,000, according to the value system in our economic society, he must somehow equate the importance of his job with that of the many people who judge him by his teaching salary, or his more visible standard of living. Inevitably, the teacher is psychologically forced to lower the evaluation of his job, and even of himself, to correspond to this community-wide evaluation.

After he hears, "Oh, Joe? He is just a teacher over at Woodbridge High," three or four times, he soon begins to believe that he is "just a teacher." Sometimes this gap between community stereotype and the teacher's ego ideal is devastating. Witness this true story:

"A parent in a wealthy suburb in Philadelphia visited her Johnny's teacher to see why he was such a discipline problem. She confided in the teacher that she could not understand his behavior since, 'I always teach my children to be nice to the help.'"

Students respond to status symbols of this kind more than we realize. Thus, as the teacher is better paid, he will gain better respect from and control over his students.

An aspect of teachers' salaries that affects the teachers' evaluation of the teaching role is the ratio of teachers' salaries to those of administrators. When a new teacher learns that the principal is paid two or three or four times as much as he is, he cannot help but wonder whether teaching or non-teaching duties are more important. Furthermore, in his mind this reduces the teacher's status relative to the growing corps of non-teaching supervisors, specialists, and quasi-administrators.

We are not saying that school administrators' salaries should be leveled down to the classroom teacher, but that both the administrator and the teacher should have their salaries raised, only asking that the latter be raised faster than the former in order to lessen this unnatural "status gap."

Status is important, and so are classroom conditions. And it is these factors that remain obstacles to the attainment of excellence in teaching.

Other economic conditions of significance that have been negotiated in our collective bargaining agreements are such fringe benefits as extended sick leave provisions; sabbatical leaves for rest, as well as for restoration of health, travel and education; and various types of health insurance benefits.

The latest provision in the New York City contract provides for a welfare fund, the first in the nation's schools, to my knowledge. The Board of Education puts in \$140 a teacher per year, and benefits to be paid from the fund are agreed upon by the Board and union representatives. Administration of the fund, including approval of benefits to individual teachers, is the sole responsibility of the union. At the moment, the union is in the process of selecting the benefits X which it will recommend to be covered by the fund. These will probably include major medical, life insurance, and either dental insurance or a drug plan.

The welfare fund idea is a sound way to handle fringe benefits because unified benefits can be provided in an area in which teachers have lagged behind employees in private industry. New York City teachers, incidentally, already have one of the best pension arrangements in the country, with Social Security coming on top of it. Also, complete health and hospital insurance will be paid in full for the teacher outside of the welfare plan.

Working Conditions

It is very difficult, in a professional situation, to draw a distinct line between working conditions and professional matters. Working conditions, in turn, may also be considered as included within economic gains.

The typical AFT collective bargaining contract establishes an orderly procedure for job assignments within the school, thus minimizing the dependence of the teacher upon the arbitrary good-will of the principal. The elimination of non-teaching chores through the use of school aides by its very nature strengthens the role of the teacher qua teacher and professional. The expansion of unassigned periods frees the teacher from part of the excessive routinization of his life, allowing at least a modicum of time for free exercise of the professional spirit. Then again, guaranteeing of a duty-free lunch period eliminates a shameful practice which, for many years, had denigrated the elementary school teacher as a person and as a professional.

These new preparation periods, furthermore, are used primarily for creative activity of a great variety--improvement of visual aids facilities, assistance in teacher training, drawing up of all kinds of curriculum materials, marking papers, interviewing pupils, etc.; and it certainly bolsters the professional spirit when principals leave it to the good judgement of the individual teacher to choose the type of activity that he wishes to pursue during these periods.

Professional Matters

The AFT views professionalism somewhat differently than the associations. There are many possible definitions of the term, and it is, at best, a very ambiguous one. But to us, a truly professional status involves improved working conditions, as well as professional matters in the narrower sense, that is, items involving the nature and quality of education. To us, professionalism has at least three inter-related ingredients: 1) high individual standards of performance; 2) the existence of conditions of work that make it possible to apply these standards; and 3) collective power to control these conditions of work.

Through our collective bargaining agreements we are experiencing a veritable revolution in the control and in the nature and quality of education.

In Detroit, the agreement provides for definite rules and procedures governing the respective rights and duties of the teacher and of the administrator in the control of discipline in the schools.

Philadelphia has a section on the extended services program--a system of after-school activities. The United States Commissioner of Education, Francis Keppel, speaking at our national convention in Los Angeles last summer, called for much greater utilization of school facilities. He pointed out, I think correctly, that we cannot continue to think in terms of the 9 - 3 school day in these times of direct attack on poverty and ignorance. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers has negotiated both the nature of the activities to be offered and the compensation to be paid. The program is not the ultimate, but it is a good beginning, and I think we will have to face up to this problem throughout the nation. In doing so, we must avoid confusion between greater utilization

of school facilities by children and extension of the teaching day. The Philadelphia system goes only a part of the way in this regard. Teachers accept after-school assignments on a voluntary and paid basis and that is good, but we have long talked about making teaching a one-job profession.

I think we might well explore a system of staggered shifts with appropriate shift differentials and pay rates so that no teacher would be encouraged to take on more work than he can perform at a high level of professional competence.

The New York City contract provides for non-professional teacher aides for non-professional duties, such as lunch, yard, lavatory, and hall patrols, as well as clerical duties. Provision is made for the greater use of specialists in the elementary schools to teach the specialized subjects such as music, art, and health education.

Collective bargaining also stands to improve professionalism in another sense; namely, in the sense of the standards that guide the teacher as well as the school system as a whole.

First, the teacher, by becoming personally involved in the day-to-day decisions affecting his work, naturally tends to become more and more interested in other aspects of his teaching activity, including the so-called purely professional. The union sees its own role as evolving into an ever-widening area of interest.

The United Federation of Teachers (Local #2, New York City) has brought into its collective bargaining discussions such matters as the inadequacy of currently available textbooks; auxiliary services; the practices of the Board of Examiners in recruiting, examining and licensing teachers; the kinds of work that may be expected of a teacher during his additional preparation periods in lieu of building assignment. And, as a result of the consultative process pro-

vided for in the contract, a comprehensive plan has been developed for improving conditions in, as well as staffing of, difficult schools, which are primarily the schools in the slum and ghetto areas. This is the More Effective Schools Plan, which the AFT has turned into a nation-wide program.

The Shift of the Focus to the Children

It should be quite clear, from what I have said heretofore, that the collective bargaining process enables us, more and more, to shift the emphasis of our concern to the student in the classroom. The improvement in economic status --teacher salaries, fringe benefits, and working conditions--emphasizes the economic barrier which has been preventing teachers from giving all of their attention to the needs of the children. In fact, as I have already pointed out, in many cases the improvement in the working condition itself is a direct improvement for the learning situation of the student. Such, for example, is clearly the case in regard to class size.

Far from being mercenary, each and every item in the contract is carefully designed to establish a high professional status for the teacher, and this makes the schools a better place in which to teach.

And because the teacher has a rejuvenated attitude and becomes a more effective professional, the focus can return to its proper place, the student. The student in need of special help now has a fighting chance because his teacher, instead of crying for help for himself, is now freed to use his abilities to a greater extent to help the individual student.

I think, in short, that the current teacher collective bargaining experiences prove conclusively that collective bargaining, unionism, and professionalism are not only compatible, but an interrelated requisite for educational progress.

The NEA As A Stumbling Block

The collective bargaining movement is now being imitated, in an ersatz manner, by the NEA. The Association calls its variant of collective bargaining "professional negotiations," and has attempted to construct a whole new nomenclature to try to prove that, while they are seeking increased teachers' benefits, they are not giving teachers any more rights than before, vis-a-vis administrators.

This effort to invent a substitute for collective bargaining has some significance, although it is really only a side effect of the movement. The significance lies in its organizational implications. The NEA has been part and parcel of the paternalistic system which stands in the way of professional progress. It has been the champion of the status quo in education.

Those who really run the organization, the hundreds of staff members in Washington and in the state associations, have depended upon the influence of administrators to insure the flow of dues income. They believe that administrators would ^{not} support general collective bargaining, and so they have anxiously tried to keep the teacher movement on a level and geared in a manner that would not risk losing their main source of support.

Thus, the focus of the collective bargaining struggle at this moment is on the question of whether or not the association managers and the managers of our schools will succeed in their efforts to pervert the movement and turn it into some reform much less sweeping than collective bargaining.

Last year there were a dozen or more proposals for collective bargaining legislation or for professional negotiations before state legislatures. The NEA and the state associations used all their power and influence to prevent bona fide collective bargaining legislation. The resultant harvest is a legislative

hodge podge. In Connecticut and in Michigan, with the help of the labor movement, good, workable collective bargaining laws were passed which give teachers almost all of the rights which have been enjoyed by employees in private industry ever since 1935. But in several other states, legislation was blocked by the associations, primarily because of their fear that if teachers were given the right to a secret ballot and the power to negotiate, the power of the associations and their administrator allies would be seriously curtailed.

In the three West Coast states, under the influence of the NEA State Associations, ludicrous hybrid laws were passed which leave everybody concerned at a loss as to how to proceed. The Washington and Oregon laws include supervisors and administrators in the voting and negotiating unit--although I think it an open question as to whether or not a principal would want teachers to decide how much he should be paid. No elections are scheduled in either state because nobody seems quite sure about what the laws require.

In California, a law sponsored by the California Teachers Association sets up a council of organizations to "discuss and confer" with each board of education. Representation on the council is to be proportional to the membership of the involved organizations. This scheme is totally unworkable, of course, because it takes no account of the fact that many teachers belong to more than one organization, and many belong to no organization at all--not to mention the fact that many teachers are forced into association membership by administrators, and would vote for the union in a secret ballot election. Furthermore, there are literally dozens of administrative organizations, each of which could have representation on the council.

In the face of this dilemma, the San Francisco Board of Education has declared that the new council will have exactly the same status as any other teacher organization. If there is anything teachers do not need, it is another organization.

The American Federation of Teachers has been urging the NEA to sit down with us to try to work out some agreement on the basic ingredients of a collective bargaining code for elections, but this sensible idea has been rejected, and I submit that the refusal of the Associations to work out a true collective bargaining pattern is nothing short of reprehensible.

None of the non-union agreements that we have examined--the so-called "professional negotiations" agreements--are anywhere near as comprehensive as the agreements that the AFT locals have negotiated. Most of the professional negotiations agreements, as in Denver, for instance, are little more than recognition clauses, with provisions for the association to meet with the Superintendent about matters of mutual concern. Furthermore, none of them have specific termination dates.

The termination date is one of the most important features of any collective bargaining contract because it implies that if a new contract is not negotiated to follow after the current contract, something drastic will happen. Just what "drastic" means depends upon the teachers in each case.

I personally favor a "no contract, no work" rule; that is, teachers will work only under terms and conditions to which they have agreed. This rule has been applied with great success in the Canadian Provinces, as well as in New York City. It is also somewhat similar to the NEA sanctions--although "no contract, no work" is much easier to understand, less subject to flim-flamming, and less damaging to the school system in the long run.

A contract with an expiration date has a built-in signal system--either you have a contract or you do not. There is no half-way point, and no investigating commission is needed to evaluate whether or not a contract is in existence.

In general, the forces of the status quo--the school boards, the administrators, and the National Education Association and its affiliates--are doing all that they can to keep the teachers in line by coercion and company unionism. Such is the case, for example, in Lincoln Park, Michigan, where a so-called "negotiated agreement" gives the teachers almost nothing in improved working conditions, but contains a list of so-called working conditions which are really a code of ethics for teachers and makes all kinds of commitments on the part of teachers to behave as "professionals". Such, for example, is the requirement "that all teachers will report to their buildings at least 15 minutes before classes begin and be in the vicinity of their classrooms unless otherwise assigned by the building principal. Further, teachers agree to stay not less than 15 minutes after closing time, whatever that designated time may be in a particular building." ^{add} ^

Collective Bargaining and Unionism

I want to conclude by saying another word about the relation of collective bargaining to unionism and to the labor movement as a whole. I have already referred to the "gingerly" approach to collective bargaining taken by the non-union associations. This is because the association is so largely dominated by the management group and because the association bargaining units include members of both the management group and the employee group. The AFT, being a union, is not troubled by any ambivalence toward collective bargaining. Even where the local takes in some levels of supervisors into the membership, it does not include them in the same unit with classroom teachers for collective bargaining

Encouragement of collective bargaining is the main raison d'etre for the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO is founded on the fact that all employees have problems in common, and that by working together they can all benefit.

We in the AFT are proud of our AFL-CIO affiliation, just as musicians, television engineers, newspaper men and many other professional groups are proud to be in the labor movement. But there is a very special reason why teachers should be a part of the union movement. We are agents of social progress. We have been charged by society with the professional responsibility to see to it that American children are prepared to function as responsible, self-supporting adults, committed to the principles of democratic society. We in the AFT do not believe that this responsibility ends at the classroom door. If slums are an anti-educational force, then we have an additional responsibility to work with other groups to eliminate slums. If extremist groups would try to curtail educational activity, we have a responsibility to try to curb their nefarious activities.

The largest, most powerful and most active organized group working for the same objectives as teachers is the AFL-CIO; so, in addition to all the more mundane reasons for affiliation with organized labor, we maintain our affiliation because they are "going our way."

The teacher union movement, the labor movement, and the new militant movement toward collective bargaining are all going in the same direction. Increasing numbers of teachers are going to see that this is the way for them to go, too. Ours is a dynamic movement with a great future. There is a place for every teacher in this movement. In particular, there is a place for those who want to be able to focus education on the child in the classroom.