

What shall we do with the supervisors?

The AFT has long made a point of its freedom from domination by administrators and supervisors. Very few belong to the AFT, and the overwhelming sentiment among AFT members is in favor of excluding them from membership altogether. Yet at the 1965 AFT Convention, a series of constitutional amendments to exclude supervisors and administrators from membership was referred to the Executive Council for clarification and report back to the 1966 Convention. Part of the reason for the referral was the involved parliamentary situation which developed, but there was also strong resistance on grounds of substance.

While there is no question about the status of the AFT as a union for teachers, any discussion of inclusion of supervisors in the union raises troublesome questions.

If supervisors are to be excluded, what about staunch union members who become supervisors?

If we force supervisors to leave they will go into the NEA. Is this what we want?

Schools with union principals tend to have a favorable climate for union organizing. Why throw this advantage away?

Supervisors have more free time than teachers; why not let them do some of the union work that teachers do not have time to perform?

Supervisors have access to materials and information which can be of great help to the union. Should we shut off this assistance?



How can we exercise any control over supervisors if they are not in the union?

Aren't teachers and supervisors working for the same objectives? Why split our forces?

Some insurance and other benefits are available to AFT members only. Is it fair to deny these to a loyal union member when he receives a promotion?

The question is further complicated by the fact that, contrary to popular assumption, many unions include supervisors among their memberships. At a recent conference of leaders of unions whose membership is largely composed of technical and professional workers, such as engineers, musicians, actors, and newspapermen, most of the unions represented were found to include supervisors. Some, like the Newspaper Guild, were chary of recruiting in upper supervisory eschelons, while others seemed willing to take any salaried employee, regardless of his authority and rank.

The assumption that unions do not include supervisors is probably based on provisions of the Labor and Management Relations Act which exclude supervisory personnel from the rights provided under the act. These stipulations were not included in the original Wagner Act, probably for historical reasons rather than deliberate design. The Wagner Act was the successor to Section 7-a of the National Recovery Act, the basic New Deal economic measure which for the first time gave federal guarantees



of the right to organize and enter into collective bargaining contracts.

The NRA was intended to apply primarily to mass employment industries. The idea behind Section 7-a was that if workers were given the right to unionize they would, through collective bargaining, increase their purchasing power, a basic essential for economic recovery from the Great Depression. At the time, few mass production employees were organized and the whole management apparatus, from Executive Vice President right on down to straw boss was mobilized to keep the unions out. Thus there was no thought on the part of the unions to include supervisory employees in membership.

It was only later on, when foremen in some of the auto plants formed a union and tried to utilize the services of the National Labor Relations Board, that formal prohibitions were put into the law. It was management, as much as the unions, which sponsored the legal restriction.

On the other hand, skilled craft unions, such as the printers and building trades unions, almost invariably include foremen, and many of these unions required the foreman to belong to the union. Some go even higher on the management side of the bargaining table. Since these unions tend to use NLRB services less than mass production unions, the legal problems are minimized.

Some unions admit supervisors to membership and some do not. The distinction seems to be based on two factors.

First, if status and power relationship within the industry



in which the union functions are clearly defined and accepted, the conflicts between the lower and middle management group and the non-supervisory employee group tend to be reduced.

Second, where the union has a strong element of control over hiring and firing - virtual closed shop conditions - the powers of management in general are restricted, and non-supervisory employees do not feel an appreciable element of intimidation involved in the presence of supervisory employees in the union.

Neither of these two conditions are present in education.

Teaching is still an emerging profession. The status and power relationships within education are in a state of flux. The essential, underlying drive behind the new militant teacher movement is the effort by teachers to gain more status and control within the educational enterprise.

As for the question of control over hiring and firing processes, teachers have no control whatever over hiring, and their only influence on firing except where collective bargaining has been established, is through the enforcement of tenure laws, a recourse vastly inferior to most union mechanisms for the prevention of discriminatory and unjust dismissal.

So far as practices in other unions are concerned, then, the AFT should fall in the category of unions which exclude supervisors, despite the "skilled craft" nature of teaching. There is a basic conflict between the objectives of the AFT and the Educational Establishment. Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, inclusion of members of the establishment within the union places



them in a position to exert undue influence on the policy of the union.

Within the AFT, I suspect that those locals which admit supervisors to membership offer little challenge to the traditional paternalistic educational order, while locals which exclude supervisors tend to be in more or less open revolt against "the system". This does not mean that the locals with supervisors are not effective in many areas of teacher interest, but it does mean that any benefit which impinges on administrative prerogatives will be low on the list of union objectives. In fact, those few AFT locals which admit supervisors and administrators have been quite effective in securing salary increases and fringe benefits, and apparently the influence of these members has been a key factor in the success of the union. However, it is significant that no local in which supervisors and administrators play an important role has achieved collective bargaining status.