TEACHERS AND POLITICS
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By James W. Guthrie,

and

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Education in America is rapidly becoming more political. The conflict over the division of educational resources (the question of who gets what, why, and how) appears to be growing more intense. Teachers have, by design or by fate, become important protagonists in this politicization.

The purpose of this booklet is to examine briefly the political nature of education in America and to explore teachers' emerging political roles by looking at (1) the evolution of their power, (2) the manner in which they have used it, and (3) their potential for maximizing their influence in the future political melee, which appears inevitable.
THE MYTH OF APOLITICAL EDUCATION

Schooling has always been tightly tied to the political process. At least since Plato, men have discussed the important relationship between education and the political order. Yet, decisions regarding the operation of schools are not generally considered to be political decisions. Particularly since the end of the nineteenth century, a myth of apolitical education has grown and persisted in America. During the early 1900s, partisan political activity was at its peak throughout the nation, and corruption and bossism were almost the rule rather than the exception. To the general public, politics connoted unsavory and dirty practices. Thus, professional schoolmen hoped that education could rise above politics. They strove to have education become nonpolitical and nonpartisan. However, to understand politics only in terms of the covert or overt activities of partisans and parties is to accept a very narrow definition of the political process. A more comprehensive view, offered by the political scientist, describes politics as the distribution of values within a society that are legitimized through governmental action. When seen through this set of glasses, educational decision making has always been an intimate part of the political process. What to teach, who teaches, who goes to school, what books are used, and who pays the bill are all questions that tie schools to politics.

The myth of apolitical education persisted, at least in part, because education was not a highly visible component of American culture until World War II. Most people graduated from elementary school, but public expectations did not extend far beyond that point. The dollar resources used by schools were not large; the
average annual expenditure per pupil in 1940, for example, was approximately $100. Moreover, the dollars that were used were obtained by a relatively easy process—a local board of education simply increased property taxes. Because they were a special government, schools had their own revenue source and did not have to compete for funds at a local level with other municipal services. Further, until recently, state contributions to school support were not very controversial. Today, however, schools are receiving vast amounts from state governments, at a time when other public sector services are also demanding funds. Education has surfaced in the midst of troubled political waters.

In the past twenty-five years, public education in America has become highly visible. One of the important reasons for this increased political visibility has been the remarkable expansion of the numbers of people being served and the resources needed to sustain the entire endeavor. A brief statistical digression will quickly illustrate the economic realities of contemporary public education.

Today, schooling touches more people directly than ever before; more than one of every four Americans is enrolled in some type of formal educational program. In addition, school expenditures are continuing to consume a growing proportion of the gross national product. Since the end of World War II, expenditures for education, as a proportion of GNP, have more than doubled. (See Figure 1.) Total expenditures for elementary and secondary education were less than $2 billion in 1940; today, they have risen to a point in excess of $50 billion.

Since 1960, the cost of financing education has risen at an average annual rate of 9.7 percent, while the growth of GNP has averaged only 6.8 percent during the same period. Educational expenditures have thus increased 43 percent faster than the expansion of the national economy as a whole. Certainly a large portion of these expanded costs can be attributed to enrollment gains and decline in the purchasing power of the dollar. Allowing for a doubling of pupils and a 50 percent decline in the value of the dollar might reasonably account for a fourfold expenditure increase. However, in fact, expenditures have increased by a staggering factor of 25. The United States Office of Education has projected that by 1980, if current trends persist, the United States
will be spending $106 billion for all levels of education. If this projection becomes a reality, education will have equaled or surpassed expenditures for national defense, making it the nation’s largest public sector activity.

**FIGURE 1**
Total Expenditures for Education as a Percentage of Gross National Product United States, 1949-1970

![Graph showing percentage of gross national product spent on education from 1949 to 1970.](image)

Source: *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1971.*

One consequence of this staggering demand for revenues is that education has assumed vastly expanded political overtones. Not only have school politics become more visible, but they have also become more intense due to competitive demands for increasingly scarce public sector resources. Public education is competing with a growing list of social sector services whose constituents also demand financing—e.g., welfare, public safety, health, environmental control, and transportation.

The most important reason for the rise in school costs is the labor-intensive nature of the educational process. At the moment, school services are expanded only by increasing the number of
teachers. Thus, salaries comprise the major category of total expenditures for schools. The high labor cost for teachers incurred by school districts reflects not only salary increases but also efforts to lower the number of pupils in each classroom. As a consequence of these efforts, the teacher work force has grown enormously in the last quarter century, from slightly over one million in 1940 to nearly three million in 1971.
THE EVOLUTION OF "TEACHER POWER"

One of the important characteristics of a democratic system is the freedom to organize into groups and to attempt to influence political decisions. It is a right that is expressly guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Under this umbrella of freedom, interest groups, such as physicians, farmers, manufacturers, and labor unions, have coalesced to form powerful and effective instruments for influencing legislative decisions.

Today, teachers are also emerging as an interest group that cannot be ignored. In terms of numbers alone, their potential equals or exceeds other powerful interest groups. (See Figure 2.) It has been estimated that by 1980 membership in educational organizations could reach 3.5 million, and the ability to generate funds through dues and other assessments could attain the somewhat staggering annual level of $500 million. Such revenue potential has important political implications, particularly in light of teachers' growing involvement in partisan activities. In terms of workers to perform precinct chores, dollars for campaign "war chests," and the ability to hire advocates at every level of government, teacher groups would have few peers in modern style election campaigns and lobbying arenas.

The relative success or failure of pressure groups in influencing decisions depends upon several organizational variables, of which three are of primary importance. The first is group cohesion. The more cohesive a group, (that is, the more they agree upon goals and policy), the more effective their leaders can be. When a group is highly cohesive, the leaders' claim of "speaking for the
group” becomes more credible. Many an advocate testifying before a legislative committee in behalf of his organization has found his position weakened by the allegation that his members were divided on the issue.

**FIGURE 2**
Membership by Occupation of Influential Interest Groups in the United States

![Bar Chart]


The second important variable is the group’s policy objectives. The more diffuse the group’s goals become, the less likely the group will be to effect change in any one area. Moreover, when group goals and values are consonant with societal norms, it is easier for the group to gain access to government and to effect change. For example, groups such as the Black Panthers, Ku Klux Klan, and the John Birch Society, whose values deviate too far from the center of prevailing societal norms, find it nearly impossible to gain a legislative audience. It has been said that the game of American politics is played between the thirty-yard lines, and those whose values fall outside these prescribed boundaries are, essentially, out of the game. Thus, it is important for interest groups to be willing to modify their values in order to achieve access to governmental decision makers.

The third factor is the quality of the leadership. Leaders must
not only have an intimate knowledge of the legislative process, but they must also be sufficiently strong to maintain solidarity in times of conflict.

In the past, the two major nationwide educational organizations, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), have waged a battle for membership and for the right to act as the primary spokesman for America’s educators. The groups disagreed regarding organizational membership. NEA took all educators into its fold, teachers as well as administrators, whereas AFT excluded all but the classroom teacher. As long as the internecine competition existed, teachers’ initiatives were rather easily parried by policy makers; school boards and state legislators played off the two groups one against the other. However, over the past fifteen years, the two national organizations have grown substantially closer ideologically; their bitter inter-organizational rivalry may be abating. A merger movement, which quietly began in 1969, has continued to gather momentum. On June 5, 1972, the New York State Teachers Association (NEA) voted to merge with the United Teachers of New York (AFT). This merger makes the New York teacher organization the largest state organization of public employees in the nation. Similar negotiations are also underway in other states. In the event a national merger succeeds, the potential for political influence would be awesome.

Not only have the organizations shown the inclination to coalesce around certain issues, but they have also consolidated their power to influence local decision making through the powerful tool of strikes and strike threats. Even though statutes in virtually every state forbid strikes by public employees, the national education associations have successfully used the device of withholding their labor to improve working conditions and financial benefits. The overall effectiveness of these tactics can be illustrated by contrasting strike activities with the increase in salaries and the number of negotiated agreements that have been signed.

Between 1955 and 1966, only 35 teacher strikes occurred throughout the United States. However, during the one-year span from 1967 to 1968, there were 114 strikes, affecting 21 states, involving 163,000 teachers, and causing the loss of 1.4 million man days of teaching. During the next year, 1968-1969, the
number increased to 131 strikes, and the loss in teaching almost doubled, reaching 2.4 million man days. During 1971-1972, strike activity declined to 89 strikes with a loss of 248,000 man days. Paralleling the mushrooming of strike activities has been the growth in the number of negotiated agreements. During the first period of significant strike action (1966-1968), the number of signed contracts increased by 44.5 percent.

In terms of salary increases, teachers’ pay gains have far outstripped other indicators of economic growth. During the period between 1952 and 1968, while teachers’ salaries increased by 128.6 percent, per capita personal income rose by only 94.7 percent and the average earnings per employee increased only 94.1 percent. Even in terms of 1970-1971 adjusted dollars, teachers were well ahead of all other occupational categories; their salaries increased by 36 percent in adjusted dollars compared to an increase of only 24 percent for all other full-time industrial employees. (See Table 1.)

**TABLE 1**

Average Annual Salary of Instructional Staff in Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools and Average Annual Earnings of Full-time Employees in All Industries, in Adjusted Dollars. United States, 1959-60 to 1970-71 (1970-71 Purchasing Power)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Salary per Member of Instructional Staff</th>
<th>Earnings per Full-time Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959-60</td>
<td>6,991</td>
<td>6,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-62</td>
<td>7,525</td>
<td>6,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>8,027</td>
<td>6,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>8,621</td>
<td>7,257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>9,201</td>
<td>7,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>9,291</td>
<td>7,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>9,570</td>
<td>7,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While it is difficult to tie strikes scientifically to salary increases, there can be little question that strikes have been an important influence in bringing about these impressive economic gains. The aim of strikes by teachers has not seemed to touch directly intransigent school boards. Rather, strikes have been directed at the public, particularly parents whose children attend the public schools. If parents become upset because their children cannot attend school, it is hoped that they will demand that school boards reach some compromise in order to return to business as usual.

An important consequence of these militant activities in addition to the fact that teachers are obtaining better salaries, is the increasing tendency of boards of education to share decision-making power over matters which, in the past, have been almost entirely within the scope of administrators and laymen. Matters that have already been negotiated by teachers include class size, teacher transfers within districts, assignment to non-classroom duties, teaching hours, and pupil-teacher ratios. Teachers are continuing to ask for increasing prerogatives in decision making that would include participating in matters such as curriculum development, textbook selection, and the selection of department heads.

What are the factors that account for the striking growth of membership in teacher organizations and their increasing desire to share in policy decisions? When President John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order No. 10988 on January 17, 1962, giving federal employees the right of collective bargaining, it was welcomed by other public employees. It was seen as an instrument for justifying collective bargaining at other governmental levels as well. There is some evidence to suggest that before teacher organizations actively began to seek change in educational policy, many states had already begun to provide collective bargaining statutes for public employees. Thus, the possibility exists that such statutes "created" dissatisfaction. Collective bargaining legislation may have provided the means by which teachers found an opportunity to acquire a "piece of the action."

Certainly, militant activity on the part of teachers has proved to be a greater stimulant to membership than the routine membership drives of the past. As an example, during 1962, when the
Boston Teachers Union (AFT) was arguing for sick-leave benefits, their membership increased by 118 percent. The following year, during a drive for duty-free lunch periods, membership increased by an additional 33 percent. This has proven true in other states as well; action, at least efforts to gain benefits, apparently speaks louder than words.

Another important factor leading to increased organizational strength has been the remarkable decline in the number of school districts. In 1900, approximately 195,000 local school districts served a total U.S. population of 76 million. Districts were relatively small, and teachers knew both their students and administrators intimately. Thus, they were able to resolve problems with the administration on a face-to-face basis. Today, the number of districts has diminished to approximately 17,000 while the population has increased to 210 million. The result has been the creation of a number of school districts that are large, sprawling, bureaucratic, and impersonal. School personnel now frequently find it difficult to know their students and their parents, seldom know all their colleagues, and are usually removed from a face-to-face relationship with the administration. Because of these alienating conditions, many may have turned to employee organizations as the most effective means of dealing with mutual problems.

A change that has probably played an instrumental part in the development of aggressive tactics by teachers has been the increase in the number of male teachers. In the early part of the century, men accounted for only 17 percent of all teachers. Within the ten-year period from 1954 to 1964, the number of men increased by 93 percent, compared to an increase for women of only 38 percent. Today men account for approximately 50 percent of all teachers.

The great influx of men into the profession appears to have had an effect upon organizational leadership. Studies relating to the attitudes of teachers have indicated that men are much more inclined to be career oriented. Many women do not have long-range plans and are likely to see their teaching career as an interim role until they marry and raise families. Men tend to view teaching as their life-time career and seek advancement and upward mobility by becoming administrators. Thus, working condi-
tions and economic benefits take on greater significance for male teachers. These same studies also reveal that men are more inclined than women to favor militant activities. Not surprisingly, then, leadership positions within the educational organizations are generally held by men at all levels.

The relative political success of teachers in provoking the public to share decision-making control and the obvious potential to gain benefits for themselves is awesome. Yet, the consequences of their actions may not have all accrued to the benefit of educators. It may be that the curtain has dropped on Act I. There are certain constraints upon the power of teachers to act effectively within the new political context. The next section will examine these potential limitations upon teachers' attempts to gain their fair share.
INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS UPON TEACHERS’ POWER

The American political decision-making process consists of an extremely intricate web of counterbalanced strands. While it is true that pressure groups can be very effective in determining the allocation of values made by governmental units, their potential for political power is not unrestrained. The group characteristics that are important to their strength are double-edged. That is, the same characteristics that can enhance power, such as group goals and values, leadership, and cohesion, can also restrain power. Up to this point, these characteristics have been factors in the relative success teachers have had in achieving personal economic benefits. However, there is reason to suspect that these same factors may be operating as restraints upon their power to effect change in the future.

As an example, the political effectiveness of teachers may be blunted as a result of their value orientation. That is, the values and goals of teachers may be drifting from societal norms. It seems clear that the public image of teachers has at least changed and perhaps been damaged as a result of their overt political activities. The stereotype of the selfless, dedicated schoolteacher has vanished. Hard bargaining techniques, strikes, and boycotts may have blurred the teacher’s claim to professional status in the eyes of the public. It is difficult for the public to see in what way added benefits for teachers have always helped students. Thus, the layman perceives the values and actions of teachers to be somewhat at odds with his own, and, therefore, may have become much more resistant to teacher demands.
Money is another source of tension between the public and the pedagogue. Until now, an important goal of teachers has been to improve their economic situation, both in terms of salary increases and fringe benefits. If these gains had been increasing at a rate equal to other occupational groups, teacher gains might not have attracted much notice. However, when a teacher can retire with an average annual income of $13,000 while a factory worker retires at an average annual income of only $6,000 including social security benefits, it becomes difficult for the public to ignore the discrepancy.

Workers in other sectors of society are becoming jealously aware that teachers are earning much more money than they are. Fringe benefits for New York City teachers, for example, exceed those for other public sector employees such as policemen and firemen, who have comparable educational training. This fact has been recognized by Albert Shanker, president of the New York City United Federation of Teachers. He stated, "Schools are (also) losing public support because the educational gap between the teacher and the average person has considerably narrowed." Natural antagonisms are bound to develop when a police lieutenant with a master's degree finds that he is earning less than a junior high school teacher.

There is another strand in the web of power—the latent potential for unorganized interests in society to check the power of existing groups. If existing groups go beyond acceptable boundaries, there is always the potential for opposing interests within the society to organize and coalesce to counterbalance them. It has been suggested that conflict has begun to develop not only among groups that see themselves as equal to teachers but also among lower-income groups, perhaps because lower-income groups feel the strain of increased taxes most heavily.

Another development affecting the status of teachers is related to the functions of schools. Traditionally, teachers have been expected to serve as models of behavior for students; that is, they have served as "socializers." Schools have been a primary force in the individual's induction into the norms and values of society, and it has been the duty of the teacher to inculcate the ideals of democracy, fair play, respect for authority, and obedience to legitimate rules. Teachers who participate in strikes or boycotts,
which are forbidden by state law, may forfeit a certain amount of respect from both students and the public. Their image as models of good citizenship becomes difficult to reconcile with strikes and tends to increase antagonism among school board members, administrators, and the general public.

In addition to these factors, the power of teachers has been impeded by growing internal fragmentation within the educational hierarchy. Administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff, although they sometimes share organizational membership and are able to reach consensus on many issues, find it increasingly difficult to agree on the proper means of achieving their objectives. Indeed, it is even becoming difficult for these groups to reach a consensus regarding collective goals.
EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS UPON TEACHERS’ POWER

A factor limiting the power of teachers in the future, which will prove to be progressively more perplexing, is their inability to speak the language of political economics—that is, the language of cost-benefit analysis. The medium of negotiation is no longer a kind of down-home give and take between friends but is increasingly becoming the language of the sophisticated quantitative analyst. As education has become more visible, legislators are more sensitive to education’s role and also more aware of trade-offs they will have to make between education’s financial demands and other interests articulated within society. This is where the language of negotiation becomes important. Because of the delicate nature of the product of education and the difficulties of quantifying much of what goes on in schools, educators are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to competing with the health lobbyist, the transportation advocate, and others who are asking for their share in the allocation of values. Education no longer will be able to enjoy its protected and preferred status. It is now forced to compete for resources on the open market.

In the past, the request for more money from the taxpayer in support of schools was rather easily justified because the number of children who were entering schools continued to increase. Since the end of World War II, American education, at all levels, has had to contend with unprecedented growth. In the 25 years between 1945 and 1970, public elementary and secondary enrollments almost doubled, rising from 23.3 million to 45.8 million. This dramatic expansion was a consequence of several social and
demographic trends. First, the total U.S. population expanded by some 64.3 million in the 25-year period under consideration. Thus, there simply were many millions more school-age children. Second, an increasingly technological and complicated job market exerted strong pressure upon youth to acquire more years of schooling. Consequently, children remained in school for more years. For example, the median level of education nationally was 8.4 years in 1940, but today’s median national level has risen to 12.2 years.

However, the 1970s portend an extraordinarily significant shift. For the short run, at least until 1980, school enrollments are predicted to remain stable or decline slightly. Federal statistics show that for the first nine months of 1972 the birth rate dropped to 2.08 per family, which is below the “replacement” level of 2.1 required in order to achieve zero population growth. That is to say, the number of children presently being born each year is decreasing absolutely. Moreover, if present childbearing patterns persist, this absolute numerical decline will continue past 1980. The point is that U.S. lower education is, at least temporarily, over its period of greatest growth. No longer can vastly expanded school budgets be justified on the basis of enrollment increases alone.

The result of this change is that teachers and administrators are being asked to show that they are giving something extra in return for their financial gains. Most workers in society already receive salary raises based on their productivity; teachers, so far, have not. To put it in cost-benefit terms, teachers are now being asked to show that “input” (salary increases, added fringe benefits, etc.) has affected “output” (quality of education received by students). The mounting cry for accountability in education is related to the ratio of costs to benefits. While statistics abound that tell us how much money is being spent, how many teachers there are, what subjects they teach, and their educational backgrounds, there is little to tell us what has been learned. Thus, the concept of productivity or accountability may be thought of as a “proof of results” position. It is a position that has been forced upon education because of the political realities of increasingly competitive demands for economic resources.

Many school boards have contemplated the use of the “per-
formance contract” as a way of measuring productivity of schools. A performance contract is simply an agreement between a school district and an outside firm, teacher organization, individual teacher, or administrative group that calls for reimbursement to the group or individual on the basis of the measured performance of students. That is, there must be some measurable relationship between input and output. Leon M. Lessinger, dean of the school of education at the University of South Carolina, has stated that “some school boards are beginning to seek performance contracts as products of their regular salary discussions, seeing this technique as a legitimate quid pro quo when real gains in salary position are to be achieved by the staff.” Such arrangements have grown at a phenomenal rate. Between 1970 and 1971, funds committed to such contracts grew from $250,000 to an estimated $10 million; some estimates run as high as $100 million.

Another device for obtaining accountability that will affect the political power of teachers is the use of educational vouchers. Under such a system, warrants would be issued to parents who thereafter would be free to choose the school they wanted their children to attend. The success or failure of schools would depend upon parents’ evaluation of output. Such evaluation undoubtedly would take into account the performance of teachers in the classroom. To date, the opposition of educator organizations has restricted voucher plans to a few experimental districts, but it is not clear that such opposition can continue to curtail the idea.

State and federal constitutions act in tandem to grant state governments plenary authority over school policy making. However, most states have seen fit to delegate substantial authority to local boards of education because they recognize that schools traditionally were governed by the local residents they served and because of the need for administrative efficiency. Typically, local boards are viewed as an important foundation for lay control over decision making. However, as teachers achieve political strength and force boards to share their delegated authority, a power realignment begins to emerge. The aggressive tactics of teachers, particularly at the local level, have made it increasingly difficult for school boards to resolve value conflicts, and
educational policy decisions are therefore being forced to higher and higher governmental levels. If this trend continues, one can envision educational policy being made at the federal level in annual negotiating sessions between the "American Brotherhood of Educators" and the "Secretary of Education." That would be a long journey from the traditional concept of the client self-determination relationship that has been central to American education.

It is apparent that teacher organizations have the potential to muster the incredible resources that would be necessary to deal at the federal level, but other interests within society that are concerned with the school system may resist. It is not always clear to local citizens that the interests of teachers are necessarily the interests of the school district as a whole. As the public begins to feel a loss of contact with the educational decision-making process, we may witness an opinion backlash in the form of a call for community control, parent influence, or participatory democracy. By any name, however, the desire is the same. If district officials cannot make decisions, then parents are asking to make them at their local school level, where the service is actually delivered. It is possible that political activities of teachers, particularly strikes, served as a catalyst to unite parents into a cohesive and potentially powerful counterforce. Parents may see a conflict between teachers' goals and their own. The renewed drive for local control of schools is an attempt to recapture public or lay control over public school decisions.

Another external factor that will continue to have an impact upon decision-making relationships is the increasing use of the courts to resolve conflict within the educational establishment. Courts have always tended to tread gingerly over new ground. For example, in the case of legislative reapportionment, the U.S. Supreme Court continued to show its hesitancy to enter what Justice Felix Frankfurter called the "political thicket." The consensus of the Court was that political matters should be resolved by the people, acting through their representatives, rather than by the judicial process. However, legislatures failed to act responsibly over a long period of time. Finally, the Court reluctantly stepped in, and Baker v. Carr became the wedge to challenge legislative apportionment on the basis of the "equal pro-
tection of the law," as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Courts have exhibited the same reluctance in questions of educational policy. However, this too may be changing. The courts appear to be more frequent participants in the educational policy-making arena. The increased litigation of educational issues portends a somewhat diminished role for local decision-making bodies as well as for teachers.

The courts have issued decisions that have restricted school boards in matters such as the regulation of student conduct and discipline, personnel compensation and dismissal, and the types of examinations that can be given to children. One suspects that interpretation of negotiated contracts will also inevitably reach the courts.

All such decisions may very well invoke badly needed and long-awaited reforms that school boards and other legislative bodies were not willing to make on their own initiative. Given the apparent trend within American society toward greater reliance upon litigation as a means of redressing social inequalities, it would appear that the role of courts in determining educational policies will continue to increase. However, the salient point is that such judicial entries into the field of school policy will thereafter restrict the prerogatives of decision making on the local level and will reduce decentralized authority. Thus, court decisions related to education have implications for both the control and the organization of education.
A REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL POWER

Obviously, a new power relationship is emerging, based upon the political realities of a free society. Albert Shanker, president of the New York City United Federation of Teachers (AFT), has phrased it very bluntly:

Power is never given to anyone. Power is taken, and it is taken from someone. Teachers, as one of society's powerless groups, are now starting to take power from supervisors and school boards. This is causing and will continue to cause a realignment of power relationships.

But the difficulty with teachers' "sharing" power is the fact that responsibility for school decisions becomes ambiguous. That is, teachers are not officially responsible to the public in the same way that school board members are. In fact, as long as there are tenure laws, teachers will probably remain relatively immune to public censure. The concept of representative government and free and frequent elections derives from the notion that the public should be able to elect someone who will reflect its views, and, if he does not, the representative can be replaced at the next election. This concept requires that the public must be able to place the blame for unsatisfactory decisions with some degree of certainty. When others begin to share delegated power, rather than simply being heard along with other interests, accountability for decisions becomes difficult. A former president of the National School Boards Association said:
It is time for teachers to decide whether they are calling for joint responsibility with boards of education—or whether they are saying we have joint concerns with boards of education, and we want our opinions to be heard and our counsel to be carefully considered before decisions are reached by the board.

There is tentative evidence that strike activities may be causing a "backlash" effect. For example, membership in the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) has declined from 21,000 to 14,500 since 1970. Leaders of the UTLA reluctantly admit that the "stigma of the 1970 strike makes it difficult to enroll new members." Albert Shanker of New York has also recognized the negative effects of strike activity on public opinion. Shanker states, "Strikes may no longer be effective because of public resentment and because of the financial pressure on school boards. Now that they (teachers) have made big gains, the public reaction is likely to be 'what do they want now?'"

The short-run gains made by teachers, in terms of salaries and fringe benefits and shared power in decisions with local boards, may have long-range consequences that are just beginning to surface. As organized groups begin to move out from the center of the political web, the threads begin to tighten, leaving only two alternatives. One is to move back toward the center, thus relieving the tension; the other alternative is to continue on an outward course until the web tightens and breaks, severing the connection between the group and the remainder of society. Teachers may have reached the limits of their outward trajectory. In light of the difficulties that will be faced in the continued exercise of power by teachers, there are ways in which they may maximize positively their potential for power in the future. This will be the subject of the next section. The decision by teachers regarding the proper course for the future will determine the outcome of Act II of the political drama.
TEACHERS' POTENTIAL FOR MAXIMIZING POLITICAL POWER

A concern that should receive first priority with teachers is the development of their professional image. A study of the New York State Commission on the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education viewed professionalism in the following way:

By definition, professionalism represents dedication on the part of practitioners to the enhancement of human welfare and relief of suffering, a dedication transcending the immediate and rightful claims of the practitioners for personal profit. Professionals expect to meet given standards of practice in serving their clients, and furthermore on their own initiative seek to improve their skills and to stay abreast of advances in knowledge and practice in their fields. They are willing to devote the necessary time to their endeavors free of concern about stated hours of work and overtime remuneration.

This does not seem to fit the growing public image of teachers, whose main concern in the recent past has frequently appeared to be personal economic gain. Much of the public views teacher unionization as incompatible with claims of professionalism. It is important that teachers should at least appear to satisfy most of those professional requirements generally maintained by other groups such as physicians, engineers, and lawyers.

One means of achieving professional standards would be for teachers to set aside their plans to mimic trade unionism and reject strikes as a means of forcing policy decisions upon school boards. As a means of achieving group ends, strikes may no longer be the powerful tool they have been in the past. With cur-
rent capabilities of private firms to negotiate performance contracts, districts faced with strikes might easily contract with these firms to teach basic academic skills. Faced with this possibility, it may be desirable for teachers to reassess their opposition to proposed educational reforms and consider alternative actions.

For example, there seems to be no reason why teachers should not enter into performance contracts with districts. Why should teachers be willing to leave the field open to private firms who might make a profit from education? Why shouldn’t such profit go to teachers? In fact, in Dade County, Florida, the school board contracted with both a private firm and a group of local teachers in two elementary schools to improve both math and reading skills. Teachers and the private firms were given $55 per student along with “autonomy in the classroom that they’d never had . . . a heady experience for most teachers.” After four months, achievement scores indicated the teachers had far outstripped the private firm in almost every subject area. The teacher group showed “an average per-pupil reading gain of 11.3 months and a mathematics gain of 7 months.” The private firm was able to show an average per-pupil gain of only 5.1 months in reading and 3.3 months in math scores. Thus, Florida teachers were able to turn the public’s desire for educational reform to their own advantage, and, at the same time, students’ basic skills improved.

Another proposed reform that appears to threaten teachers is the voucher plan system. Implicitly, there is only a tenuous bond between parents and schools in public choice plans. Teachers develop natural feelings of insecurity because of a fear that parental decisions about schools will be made irrationally on the basis of matters that bear little relationship to educational effectiveness or goals. This situation lends credence to earlier statements regarding the necessity for teachers to acquire the language of expertise—cost-benefit analysis. Both the voucher system and performance contracts focus upon productivity in the classroom. Because teachers have been slow to acquire skill in using quantitative language, their statements about education have been framed in humanitarian and philosophical terms, and, until now, teachers have not been able to state their case positively. Today’s computer-oriented society demands statements that can be tested and verified. Teachers are going to be asked to show, in quan-
itative terms, how direct benefits to them will accrue to the ultimate advantage of children.

Measurements currently used to verify classroom productivity are the standardized achievement tests given to students. Although they are not a perfect measure, they are the most reliable test presently available. If teachers are not satisfied with present measures, they have the resources available to initiate and conduct their own independent research to develop better evaluative methods. Teachers might consider supplementing their organizational staffs with researchers, professional planners, economists, and analysts. By developing fluency in the language of cost-benefit analysis, teachers could begin to phrase their concern for personal benefits in a way that would place emphasis on effects upon students. Public hostility might be reduced if the layman were reassured that the concerns of teachers were more child-centered and less self-centered.

Another important way to shape an acceptable image is through the development of a true professional hierarchy such as is found in medicine and law. The medical profession is built upon an important stratification of skills. Vocational nursing forms the foundation; laboratory technicians and registered nurses are at the next level; doctors and surgeons occupy the apex. A hierarchy for teachers has been suggested in the New York State Education Commission study. First, the study recommends Intern or Apprentice Teachers. All teachers would enter service at this level and serve a full-time internship for at least two years. Those who successfully completed the internship would be advanced to the next category of Classroom Teacher or Special Teacher. The Classroom Teacher would have major responsibility for working with normal children in standard subject fields, whereas Special Teachers would be individuals able to deal with children who have special educational needs. After a period of exemplary service and additional training, the Classroom and Special Teachers would be designated as Master Teachers and would undertake responsibility for training future Apprentice and Intern Teachers. In addition, the commission proposed an experimental teacher corps composed of talented teachers specially equipped to work with educationally disadvantaged students, generally those in low-income neighborhoods.
Until now, the classroom teacher, as compared to members of other professions, has been remarkably unspecialized, and there has been little recognition of different levels of expertise and specialization within the teaching profession. A 1958 report by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund noted: “Perhaps no profession has suffered such a general neglect of specialized abilities as that of the teacher.” Because no clearly defined levels have existed within the teaching profession, new teachers cannot anticipate any change in their position as they become more experienced or develop specialized skills. In the past, the path of upward mobility has been to seek positions within administration, which has often meant that excellent teachers have left the classroom. Specialization and skill stratification would allow teachers to capitalize on their teaching strengths and would provide an opportunity for them to rise within the ranks as teachers rather than through administration.

Finally, in order to develop greater group cohesion and status, teachers should consider avoidance of group involvement in purely partisan activities. After all, teachers require the support of the community, and fierce partisan encounters might tend to polarize segments of the community as well as alienating members of the professional group. Teachers should strive to maintain neutral partisan relationships since they will have to depend ultimately upon the support of both parties. The more violent the conflict over candidates and issues, the more difficult subsequent compromise may be to achieve. Money put into educational research may yield more benefits in the long run than money spent in expensive political campaigns—for example, the active AFT campaign during 1972 to “dump” President Nixon. For these reasons, teachers might find personal gains more readily accomplished if they concentrated their greatest energies upon political matters that relate directly to education.

Political activity can easily fragment teachers’ organizations, as in the case of the Michigan Education Association (MEA). During 1972, the MEA spent well over $200,000 in state election campaigns that were singularly unsuccessful. A good deal of internal tension has been created because of the association’s political activity, and there has been strong criticism from members who “resented the whole political action.” Partisan activities
should be encouraged on an individual basis, but group positions and activities might best be avoided. If the public recognizes that the concerns of teachers are the same concerns shared by others whose goals are the promotion of excellence in education, overt conflict will begin to subside. If teachers feel that it is impossible to forego partisan group activities, they should be aware of potential costs in terms of further damage to their professional status.

As long as teachers remain fragmented, it will be difficult for them to maximize their political strength. Any potential for power will be lost due to the energy required to resolve internal conflicts. The Emergency Committee for Full Funding stands as an example of the potency of group cohesion. This national committee was organized for the express purpose of lobbying Congress for the full funding of authorized legislation. Seldom has either the House of Representatives or the Senate defeated bills that have come out of appropriations committees. However, through their successful lobbying activities on the floor of the House and Senate, the Emergency Committee for Full Funding has been successful in achieving additional revenues beyond those recommended by Congressional appropriations committees. Such success in the national legislature focuses upon the benefits to be derived from narrowing organizational goals and concentrating energy upon achieving those goals. Another incipient effort, the California Congress of Education, has emerged under the leadership of several officials in the State Education Department. The congress, which includes parents, teachers, administrators, boards of education, taxpayers’ associations and others, campaigned against a 1972 California tax initiative that they believed might cause serious difficulties in future financing of California schools. Through their efforts to educate the electorate, the initiative was defeated by more than a two-to-one margin. Again, tight cohesion and a focus upon a single goal facilitated their success. As yet, teachers have not shown the same interest in setting aside matters on which they cannot agree in order to develop a narrower range of objectives.

Several factors indicate that teachers might be wise to choose alternatives that will bring them back toward the center of the political web. First, despite the central importance of education
in the minds of most Americans, the 1960s witnessed the onset of increasing dissatisfaction with schools. This unhappiness undoubtedly arose from many sources, not the least of which was a general and diffuse anxiety among Americans about social institutions in general. Nevertheless, schools came in for, and are still subject to, an extraordinary amount of criticism. Student rebellions began on college campuses and quickly spread downward through lower grade levels. Minority communities accused public schools of not being responsive to their needs. Many middle-class parents and students came to view their schools as too rigid and narrowly focused. So-called free schools arose as competitors of the public school system, and alternative schools were created on an experimental basis within the public school system. In addition, voters continue, with increasing frequency, to reject requests of additional tax revenues for schools.

To say that everyone is dissatisfied with schools would be too strong by far. Opinion polls continue to reveal a vast reservoir of popular support for schooling. Nevertheless, indicators of widespread discontent are sufficient to posit that public education probably is on the verge of a substantial reexamination. With the resources available to teachers, they have the potential for leading the field.

The conflict over political power in education rests on the question of who will rule. The evolution of the proper power relationship will not be easy. Education is an integral part of the political process, and teachers will be most effective by cultivating greater political sophistication and understanding of the political milieu. Of fundamental importance is the understanding that in America power is not exercised in a vacuum. Power is diffuse and the sources of power are both multiple and changing. The potential for unorganized interests to coalesce is always present. The current demand of the public to play a substantial role in educational decisions requires careful consideration by teachers. Wilson Riles, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, stated recently in an interview: "The time is over now for the teacher or the schools to do their thing and keep the parents out of it."

It is also becoming increasingly clear that the supply of money for schools is not unlimited. Money is already tight, and the result
of internal conflicts within the educational community itself may mean that the public will be even more anxious to curtail additional requests for school revenues. If goals cannot be agreed upon by educators, the public may be inclined to pursue its own targets.

Although the scenario for the future is still to be written, it is the opinion of the authors that, in the long run, teachers will benefit most by taking a rational and realistic approach and by seeking the initiative in working out cooperative liaisons between the community, the administration, and legislative bodies. The mood of reform is real, and change is bound to occur. Now is the time for teachers to reexamine their goals, directions, and methods. Teachers have a choice between initiating change or being swept along by it.
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