Can employee associations negotiate new growth?

Associations of Government employees have grown steadily and adopted collective bargaining, but prospects of future growth are limited

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The evolution of Government employee associations into virtual unions and the absorption of associations by established unions have played a major role in the growth of public-sector unionization. For many years now, most of the growth experienced by unions has come through the latter route of absorption. This article examines the ways in which Government employee associations have flourished and briefly traces their history and interaction with unions throughout the 20th century, concluding that further unionization of Government employees by absorption is unlikely.

Two broad types of Government employee associations had evolved by the mid-20th century. Single-profession associations like the National Education Association, Fraternal Order of Police, and American Association of University Professors originated in the latter half of the 19th or early 20th century. Associations that served members united by a common employer (for example, the Federal Government or a State or local government) without regard to occupation were founded in the 1940's and 1950's. Generally, both varieties of association began with limited agendas and sometimes existed only to pool members in order to purchase insurance or organize social events. Even *bona fide* Government unions often behaved like associations before the 1960's, because public workers had no legal right to bargain collectively.

Until 1960, relatively little change occurred in either type of association. Thereafter, however, their character changed dramatically. To retain their independence in the face of union competition, associations of single professions became much more like unions themselves. Among common-employer organizations, many State and local associations were unsuccessful in their bid to resist raiding campaigns and merged with established unions.

Post-1960 changes

The enactment of public-sector bargaining laws by most States, together with competition from established unions, was chiefly what drove public employee associations to adopt collective bargaining. The contributory economic, legal, attitudinal, and political factors are interrelated: unions and associations, of course, require political and sometimes economic clout to enact laws, but statutory power is also often necessary to overcome management opposition to organizing campaigns.

Public-sector bargaining laws were instrumental, if not critical, to the transformation of

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Government employee associations and their embrace of collective action.[1] In 1959, Wisconsin enacted the first State public-sector bargaining law, and more than 30 States followed during the 1960's and early 1970's. Today, only 10 States remain outside the pale of such laws. These States, with 15 percent of State and local government employees, are almost all in the South and do not sanction bargaining rights for any group of public employees. According to Al Bilik, president of the AFL-CIO Public Employee Department, unions have abandoned efforts to enact public-sector bargaining laws in them.[2] Because it is not usually explicitly forbidden, limited bargaining does occur in these States. However, the AFL-CIO reports that in 1982 (the latest data available) an estimated 71 percent of nonmanagerial Government workers were organized in States which legally permitted the majority of their employees to bargain, but only 14 percent were organized in the remaining States.[3] In several instances, the enactment of a public-sector bargaining law has affected associations directly and visibly. For example, in Ohio and California, new laws precipitated negotiations that ended in unions absorbing several associations. And in Illinois and, again, in Ohio, following the enactment of bargaining laws in 1984, bargaining representation for nonmanagerial Government employees jumped sharply.

Membership drives by established unions have in most cases been the immediate catalyst prompting associations to engage in collective bargaining. Public-sector associations with very limited agendas coexisted for decades with weak Government unions before the unions successfully began to attract larger numbers of Government workers in the 1960's. Larger associations adopted collective bargaining both in response to member demands and to ensure their continued independence. Relatively smaller associations were in many cases unable to beat the unions at their own game and were consequently absorbed.

The changing public climate in the 1960's and 1970's was another catalyst that drove associations of Government employees to resort to collective action. As challenges to authority became fashionable, unions took advantage of the changing attitudes by appealing to Government employees and their associations. Other incentives to collective bargaining were an expanding Government role in societal affairs, increased educational levels attained by public employees, and race and gender discrimination, accepted earlier but proscribed in the 1960's and 1970's. Government employee unions seized these opportunities to expand their membership.

To avoid the onslaught of unions and to respond to member demands, some major associations adopted union tactics and retained their independent status, rather than merge with an existing union. The National Education Association and the Fraternal Order of Police are the most prominent examples of associations employing this strategy; the American Association of University Professors and a number of Federal employee associations also moved in this direction, albeit more slowly. In general, we can distinguish five public-sector employee associations: Public elementary and secondary schoolteachers, college and university professors, police employees, Federal employees, and social workers.

Public schoolteachers

For over a century after its founding in 1857, the National Education Association (NEA) concerned itself with the state of education rather than the status of educators. To influence educational policy, the NEA functioned mainly as a national educational research institution at a time when Federal, State, and local governments performed virtually no educational research. The association advocated larger educational budgets, but expended only limited efforts to improve the working conditions of teachers, relying on a "trickle down" approach in the hope that increased educational investments would benefit teachers.

By the time the NEA celebrated its centennial, more than half of all public schoolteachers paid dues to the national organization or its State affiliates, but only 10 of NEA's first 97 presidents had been classroom teachers.[4] School administrators and principals constituted only a fraction of NEA's membership, but they ruled the organization. In fact, school administrators commonly required teachers who worked in schools that were under their authority to join the NEA. But by the early 1970's, the dominance of school superintendents and principals over NEA policies was history. The 1971 NEA convention voted to allow administrators to retain their membership, but teachers controlled all elective and appointive NEA bodies. In effect, administrators could be seen but not heard. Having lost their clout, school administrators in 1976 founded the American Federation of School Administrators, currently with 10,000 members. Administrators are now more welcome in the NEA, probably because the preeminent position of the rank and file is secure, but ironically, the administrators' federation is affiliated with the more blue-collar AFL-CIO.

A major impetus to the transformation of the NEA was the American Federation of Teachers

(AFT). Upon its founding in 1916, the AFT affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, but until the 1960's, the NEA could easily afford to ignore its weak rival. Before that time, the AFT's advocacy of union principles indirectly helped the NEA to maintain its conservative posture, by providing a haven for dissatisfied NEA members who favored more militant tactics to improve the status of teachers. Were there no AFT, these members might have organized factions challenging the entrenched NEA establishment. In 1961, however, the AFT became a threat to the NEA by garnering 44,000 New York City teachers in one stroke, increasing its membership by more than a third. Then, after winning the representation election, the AFT waged a successful strike in 1962 to break an impasse at the bargaining table. The AFT's organizing approach following the New York victory was simple but potent: union organizers displayed the New York contract to NEA members in other cities, saying, "Look, you can have that, too."[5]

Gradually, the NEA moved to meet the new threat. In 1962, Executive Secretary William Carr acknowledged that the organization faced a crisis that could destroy it, and urged locals to secure written agreements with school administrators. As a result, at its 1962 convention, the NEA defeated a no-strike resolution and endorsed the use of ambiguously defined "professional sanctions." Internal surveys showed that the association's teachers overwhelmingly favored collective bargaining, and even more telling was the fact that between 1963 and 1966 the smaller AFT matched NEA's vote totals in union representation elections.[6] Reacting to these challenges, the NEA by 1968 explicitly endorsed both collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Table 1 presents the membership of the NEA and AFT in selected years, as well as the number of public elementary and secondary schoolteachers, from 1955 to 1987. The figures are approximations because the two organizations have not always disaggregated teacher from nonteacher members.

The AFT was not the only catalyst prompting NEA's adoption of collective bargaining: changes in NEA leadership, the law, demographics, and professional qualifications were also important factors. Educational and societal changes radically altered the teaching profession in the 20th century. By 1920, women accounted for six of seven public elementary and secondary schoolteachers, but because many female teachers left their jobs upon marrying, teaching did not represent a career. Even if newlywed teachers continued working, they were commonly required to quit upon becoming pregnant. Following World War II, however, women were increasingly likely to stay in the labor force, giving female teachers a potential lifetime stake in the profession. Moreover, between 1950 and 1970, the proportion of male teachers in the public schools rose from 21 to 32 percent (most of these employed in secondary schools), and the figure remains at a third today. The number of public schoolteachers increased from about 900,000 in 1950 to more than 2 million by 1969. Most of these new teachers were younger, better educated, and more inclined than their predecessors to demand higher pay and enhanced status.

Table 1. Membership in public elementary and secondary schoolteachers' associations, selected years, 1955–87

[In thousands]

Year	Public elementary and secondary schoolteachers	National Education Association	American Federation of Teachers
1955	1,141	613	47
1960	1,408	714	59
1965	1,710	944	111
1970	2,055	1,100	205
1975	2,196	1,685	454
1980	2,184	1,681	551
1985	2,207	1,688	604
1987	2,276	1,829	651

The public school system became increasingly bureaucratized, and administrators interposed themselves between teachers and both students and the community. Improved transportation made it feasible to centralize school facilities. Despite swelling enrollments, the number of secondary schools remained relatively stable, and the number of elementary schools dropped from 160,000 at the end of the war to 66,000 a quarter century later. The once ubiquitous one-room schoolhouse nearly disappeared.

The market responded to the increasing demand for teachers and their demands for better pay. Concern over Soviet competition—in particular, seeming advances in Soviet space technology in the late 1950's—also spurred Federal investment in education. The ratio of teacher salaries to that of the average full-time worker increased from .88 at the war's end to 1.21 in 1970. Yet teachers wanted more, and they organized to get it.

During the 1970's, teachers lost ground. Unionization could not counteract the effect of a teacher glut as the baby bust replaced the baby

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boom and enrollment in public schools dropped by 11 percent. In the 1980's, teacher pay has again risen relative to that of other full-time workers as well as professional employees, although enrollment continued to drop during the first half of the decade. The rise in pay is attributable to a movement to improve school performance, which generated increased public support for making teaching salaries more attractive.

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 did not protect public schoolteachers. Consequently, although the first teacher contract was signed in 1944, few more were negotiated until the 1960's.[7] The reason for the increase during that time was the enactment in 1959 of the first State law permitting or requiring bargaining. Between that law's enactment and 1975, 30 States extended the right to bargain to teachers, but only 5 more have subsequently done so.[8]

More than two-thirds of public schoolteachers belong to unions, making the profession the most unionized in the public sector other than postal workers and firefighters. One-fourth of all teachers work in private (mostly church-affiliated) schools, are outside the union movement, and remain unlikely targets for the NEA or AFT because these unions vigorously oppose tuition tax credits or any other means of extending Government financing to private schools. In addition to teachers, the NEA now includes over 100,000 educational support personnel, the AFT, some 95,000. An additional 125,000 support workers have been recruited by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and roughly 100,000 by the Service Employees International Union. Both organizations are making a concerted effort to enlist a greater share of the million public school support personnel.

Although the NEA and AFT acknowledge in principle that a single organization to represent teachers would be preferable, relations between the two unions remain contentious. A merger has been tentatively explored on several occasions, coming closest to fruition in 1973.[9] Merger talks between the two organizations' California affiliates are now under way, but officials of both unions categorize these discussions as likely to lead nowhere. Questions of leadership, political differences, and the reluctance of the NEA to affiliate with the AFL-CIO have proved the most stubborn impediments to a national merger.

College and university professors

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), founded in 1915, concerned itself primarily with academic freedom during its first half century, but it also emphasized job security under the rubric of tenure. The association briefly debated the merits of pursuing collective bargaining after the enactment of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, but chose to maintain the status quo. The NEA and AFT challenged this limited agenda in 1969 when they won representation rights for separate groups of faculty at the City University of New York, whereupon the AAUP, perceiving the situation as a threat, changed its policy toward collective bargaining.[10]

In the early 1970's, 19 States enacted legislation permitting faculty bargaining, and a National Labor Relations Board ruling in 1970 extended its jurisdiction to faculty in private, nonprofit colleges and universities. These developments encouraged encroachments by the NEA and AFT on AAUP's turf.[11] By 1988, 30 States granted faculty the right to organize and bargain. In the remaining 20 States, bargaining is spotty or nonexistent.

The number of unionized faculty leaped from 14,000 in 1968 to 84,000 in 1972, when the AAUP voted to embrace collective bargaining. Unlike the NEA membership, which overwhelmingly favored collective action to improve working conditions, the new policy generated conflict within the AAUP. Membership actually declined by a third within 2 years, from a peak of 91,000 in the early 1970's. Today, it stands at 45,000. In 1987, almost a third of faculty members were represented by collective bargaining agreements, mostly by the AFT or NEA. A breakdown, by union, follows:[12]

Total faculty represented:	
Number	213,700
Percent	100.0
American Federation of Teachers	34.5
National Education Association	27.5
American Association of University Professors	10.0
Coalitions	20.0
AAUP/NEA	10.4
AAUP/AFT	7.3
Others	2.3
Independent unions	4.5
Other national unions	3.5

Because of its established and respected role in setting professional standards for academic freedom and tenure, the AAUP continues to play an important part in labor relations. The association also has greater familiarity and involvement with the traditional system of faculty governance than do the other unions. Accordingly, the NEA and AFT both solicit the AAUP's partnership in joint organizational drives. The AAUP lends greater respectability and acceptabil-

ity to organizing efforts, especially at large research universities. As AFT president Albert Shanker notes, "AAUP has a very good name—it's like the Good Housekeeping seal of approval."[13]

Despite these efforts at cooperation, coalitions between the AAUP and the other two teachers' unions have proven very unstable, due to the divergent interests of the partners. The AAUP's general secretary, Ernst Benjamin, describes his organization's relationship with NEA and AFT as one of courtship and competition, of "fight and talk, fight and talk."[14] Joint ventures have created friction within the AAUP, to the extent that several have been abandoned since 1984 and others are in a precarious condition. In the remaining coalitions, the AAUP is clearly the junior partner. For example, at the University of Hawaii and the City University of New York, the AFT does the bargaining, maintaining only a formal partnership with the AAUP.

Postsecondary educational institutions have undergone numerous changes in the past few decades. Following dramatic growth, the number of full-time faculty has stabilized at about 700,000 since 1977. The prospective increase in the college-age population in the late 1990's and rising adult enrollments are likely to generate demands for additional faculty. Tenure-track positions have been cut, as the proportion of faculty working part time has increased from 22 percent in 1970 to 36 percent in 1986, and the share laboring at community colleges has risen from 19 percent to 30 percent over the same period. Real average annual earnings for full-time instructional faculty in 1985 were 8 percent less than the peak of $35,200 reached in the early 1970's, and did not even keep pace with inflation in the following 2 years while the real earnings of all workers stabilized.[15] Declining salaries are partly attributable to the increasing number of community colleges and the increased reliance upon part-time instructors, dubbed the serfs of the academic establishment.[16]

Probably reflecting attitudes in the rest of society, declining pay has not driven academics to embrace unionization. Despite increased dissatisfaction with higher education administration, fewer faculty favored collective bargaining in 1984 than in 1975. The proportion that rejected it increased from 30 to 39 percent, those who felt that unionization would improve compensation dropped from 76 to 61 percent, and those who condoned strikes under some circumstances declined from 61 to 51 percent.[17]

A 1980 Supreme Court decision (*NLRB and Yeshiva University Faculty Association v. Yeshiva University*) exacerbated organizing difficulties by ruling that when faculties at private higher education institutions are substantially involved in the governance of the school, they are part of management. Accordingly, the court found that, for collective bargaining purposes, such university faculties are not protected by the National Labor Relations Act. Not only has the court ruling halted organizing at private colleges; it has actually resulted in the decertification of unions at several institutions. Following the decision, the number of private colleges and universities engaged in collective bargaining dropped from 89 to 74, and in eight cases the NLRB declared that faculty members were managerial employees.[18]

The failure to secure public-sector higher education bargaining rights in 20 States, the *Yeshiva* decision, and more negative faculty attitudes toward bargaining have stymied campus organizing efforts. Although a high of 213,700 faculty members (29.6 percent of all faculty) was recorded as being under contract to some professional union or association in 1987, more careful data collection probably accounts for much of the increase over previous years' figures.[19] (See table 2.) In addition, about 5 percent of the individuals covered by faculty contracts are not faculty members. For example, in the University of California system, 5,000 nurses are under faculty contract. Because of both stronger resistance in the private sector and the *Yeshiva* decision, only 5 percent of the faculty in private institutions—fewer than 10,000 professionals—are organized, compared with 40 percent of faculty in public colleges. AAUP represents the largest share of private-sector faculty; however, two of three faculty members work for Government institutions.

Adjunct faculty and nonteaching personnel appear to be relatively promising targets for membership drives, although the AAUP, NEA, and AFT have so far had little success with these

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Table 2. **Proportion of faculty under union or association contract, selected years, 1970–87**

Year	Number (thousands)	Percent		
		Total	At four-year colleges	At two-year colleges
1970 ...	47.3	10.0	6.1	26.0
1975 ...	102.3	16.3	14.4	21.7
1980 ...	148.9	21.7	17.6	32.3
1987 ...	213.7	29.6	26.4	37.6

groups. Just under 10,000 adjunct faculty (part-time, temporary, and non-tenure-track professors) bargain collectively, most having been organized by the NEA and AFT during the 1980's.[20] The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Service Employees International Union have organized most of the 60,000 clerical workers who bargain at the largest public and private universities. Thus, the AFT and NEA together represent only 7 percent of organized clericals at large institutions, and the AAUP does not represent any. Plainly, clerical employees are choosing to align themselves with the unions representing workers in similar occupations, rather than with the educational associations.[21]

Police

An unsuccessful 1919 Boston police strike, which helped Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge, who broke the strike, attain the White House, provoked a public backlash against police unions that lasted for nearly half a century. Consequently, the police organized themselves into employee associations.

Although only 30 States have enacted laws explicitly authorizing police officers to bargain, they are currently one of the more highly unionized public employee groups, with more than 200,000, or about 40 percent, of the 515,000 police officers in 1986 belonging to a union.[22] By far the largest of these is the Fraternal Order of Police, with 170,000 members. The 1987 median weekly full-time officer salary was $513, slightly more than that of teachers and nurses.

Given the relatively high level of unionization in States allowing bargaining by police officers, further growth depends upon the enactment of bargaining laws in the remaining 20 States or at the Federal level.[23] Because there has been little movement in that direction during the past 15 years, further expansion of collective bargaining by police associations is unlikely in the short term. Furthermore, many unorganized police employees work in towns with small police forces, making them both difficult to unionize and a questionable investment for unions.

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Federal employees

The passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883 was the first important step leading to the establishment of the Federal Civil Service Merit System. Formerly, the Federal work force turned over almost completely upon the accession of a new president. Employees often obtained jobs because of their political connections, with little regard to occupational qualifications, a practice which still applies to top Federal policymakers and managers.

Over time, Federal employees formed associations, but except for postal workers, these were generally powerless to influence labor-management relations. In 1962, President Kennedy established the right of Federal employees to form and join unions. As a result of Kennedy's executive order and later actions by President Nixon, the proportion of nonpostal Federal employees represented by unions climbed from 13 percent in 1961 to 60 percent in the mid-1970's, about where it remains today. However, because the law requires Federal unions to represent workers in organized agencies whether they belong to the union or not, only a third of the workers who are represented by unions are members.[24] The four major unions representing Federal employees are the American Federation of Government Employees (affiliated with the AFL-CIO), with 180,000 members and representing 700,000 employees; National Federation of Federal Employees (45,000 and 152,000, respectively); National Treasury Employees Union (65,000 and 146,000); and National Association of Government Employees (50,000 members), which was absorbed by the Service Employees International Union in 1982. In addition, the AFL-CIO Metal Trades Council and the International Association of Machinists claim to represent 100,000 Federal employees.

Legal restrictions prevent Federal unions from conducting direct bargaining over wages and benefits, from striking, and from engaging in a variety of political activities as an alternative to bargaining. The 1978 Civil Service Reform Act widened the scope of bargaining somewhat, but retained the prohibition on agency shops (which require employees to pay a fee to the union even if they choose not to join) and left the nature of Federal labor-management relations basically unchanged. Federal unions, however, are not completely without clout. While formally they can negotiate only over minor points, innovative leaders can expand the scope of collective bargaining by negotiating over the procedures used to implement management decisions, and this has permitted unions to influence the decisions themselves.

Prevented from bargaining with the direct employers of their members, Federal unions have access to the 535-member "board of directors" —the Congress—and to the White House. During the 1980's, however, their influence diminished with the Congress and they were rarely welcome at the White House. The statutory liabilities faced by Federal unions were

underscored when President Reagan fired striking air traffic controllers in 1981, destroying their union. The action served as an effective warning to other Federal workers who might have been inclined to aggressively pursue their interests, and further weakened whatever influence Federal unions previously wielded. Partly as a result, membership declined.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is currently in serious and perhaps terminal financial difficulty. In December 1987, the AFL-CIO organized a $1.5 million financial rescue package to keep the union going. The AFGE voted a dollar increase in national dues at its August 1988 convention, but the union is close to bankruptcy and may well have to merge with another public employee union, most likely the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.[25] On top of these financial woes, the National Treasury Employees Union has mounted a raid to capture 12,000 Social Security Administration workers currently represented by the AFGE.[26] Thus, unless circumstances turn around, the future of Federal unions remains bleak.

Social workers

With 500,000 practitioners, social work is by far the largest, and one of the fastest growing, of the "helping" professions. Social work is a relatively new and extremely broad profession. The first social work school opened its doors in 1898, and the establishment of professional associations took several more decades.[27] As a rule, a professional degree is not required for entry into the field, and half of all social workers do not possess a college degree in social work.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the major organization of the profession, with 115,000 members. The NASW is the only major association in a profession that, although dominated by Government workers, does not bargain collectively. This aberration is probably due to the character of the association's membership. In contrast to the profession as a whole, NASW represents primarily social workers with advanced degrees in social work. Fifteen percent of NASW members are in private practice, and the remainder are split about evenly between Government and private-sector employers. Minorities constitute less than a tenth of the membership.[28]

In line with the practice of several other professional organizations, including those for sociologists, economists, and political scientists, the NASW has eschewed involvement in labor relations and working conditions, but it has supported collective bargaining for its members since the 1940's. The current standards state that "participation in a strike by a member of NASW does not in itself constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics."[29] Some members have argued that the association should pursue bargaining, but the NASW has rejected the option on the grounds that both sides of the bargaining table belong to NASW.[30]

The first major successful organizing efforts in the profession occurred among social workers in welfare agencies during the 1960's. In addition to factors that have motivated many Government workers to establish unions, social workers faced welfare caseloads that burgeoned far more rapidly than did the number of caseworkers. Strikes occurred in New York, Chicago, and other cities. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the Service Employees International Union, and the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees stepped in to fill the void left by the NASW in organizing social workers. Data based on a small sample indicate that roughly a quarter to a third of social workers now bargain collectively.[31]

Social workers are ripe targets for further unionization. Nearly two-thirds are Government employees, 65 percent are women, and 25 percent are members of minority groups. Not surprisingly, the occupation is the lowest paid of the major professions, with 1987 median weekly earnings for full-time workers of $413, nearly $70 less than public schoolteachers.[32] Real earnings have not grown during the past decade. Salaries for NASW members, the profession's elite, peak at under $30,000 on average. Most association members work at large institutions such as social service agencies and hospitals, where organizing efforts are relatively cost effective.[33] Future organizing efforts will probably emanate from those unions which have had some experience with this group. The NASW is likely to remain aloof in any labor-management conflicts.

Union absorption of associations

While some associations have adopted union tactics, but retained their independent status, others have affiliated with existing labor unions. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Service Employees International Union have been the two most active and successful unions in absorbing associations. Largely because of their incorporation of associations, AFSCME and SEIU have been the two fastest growing unions during the past two decades. The Teamsters, Communications Workers of America, and American Federation of Teachers have pursued mergers with

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fewer gains. Unions have been successful in absorbing mostly smaller associations; the larger organizations—with some notable exceptions—have been able to fend off raids. Associations of State and local government workers have accounted for most of the affiliations with established unions, in many cases after they had already embraced collective bargaining. Few private-sector professional organizations have been caught in union nets.

Since the 1950's, union and association mergers have become increasingly common, although the pace has slowed, at least temporarily, in the late 1980's. In most cases, the affiliation of associations with unions has been the product of union raids on association membership. The AFL-CIO constitution bars member unions from raiding each other, making external associations targets for expanding membership. State laws sanctioning public-sector unionization spurred employee interest in collective bargaining, but many associations lacked resources and experience or were slow to capitalize on the new opportunities. This made the associations vulnerable to union raids and their members responsive to union appeals. The motivation driving the unions to absorb associations is that incorporation augments union size and power at a fraction of the cost of enlisting members in the old-fashioned way of organizing the unorganized.

However, most of the major State association trophies have already been bagged. Because of union absorption, independent association membership has been declining since the mid-1970's.[34] In fact, the merger movement has been so successful that the Assembly of Governmental Employees, a loose federation of State employee associations, disbanded because its ranks had been decimated by union raids.[35] Altogether, the membership of State employee associations of general government workers today numbers less than 200,000, and State associations of school employees total only slightly more than 100,000.

During the past three decades, the contrast between unions and associations has continued to blur.

Local government employee associations usually have fewer members than State associations, although in the aggregate they probably outnumber them. The most recent Government census (1982) counted 3.8 million local union and association members, accounting for 41 percent of local government employees. Excluding members of national unions, local government association members probably number no more than 500,000.[36] Local organizations are often so small that union competition over them is too costly to be worth the trouble.

Effects and prospects of bargaining

Absent the adoption of collective bargaining by associations of Government employees, union representation rates would have declined far more precipitously than they have during the past generation. Most of the increase in unionization of Government employees occurred because associations began bargaining rather than because unions recruited the unorganized. The proportion of full-time State and local employees belonging to either unions or associations (whether or not the association bargained) remained at roughly half between 1972 and 1982, the earliest and most recent years available. However, between 1974 and 1982, the proportion of full- and part-time State and local employees in bargaining units rose steadily from 31 to 40 percent.[37]

The association movement has also had a strong impact upon the unionization of professional workers, who in 1988 were more likely to be represented by unions than nonprofessionals (26.8 percent of all professionals versus 17.8 percent of all nonprofessionals). Collective bargaining by professionals is highly concentrated among Government employees: four-fifths of those represented work in the public sector. Professionals are also much more likely to work for the Government than nonprofessionals, which also boosts representation rates among professionals.

The distinction between unions and associations has not always been sharp. For example, although in existence since the 1930's, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees did not focus on bread-and-butter issues until the 1960's. During the past three decades, the contrast between unions and associations has continued to blur. Indeed, in emphasizing professional issues, such as teaching techniques and educational standards, the AFT has to some extent traded places with the NEA, which concentrates on bread-and-butter issues.[38]

The adoption of collective bargaining by associations has taken place at widely varying paces. Once the process began, the National Education Association and the Fraternal Order of Police embraced bargaining within a few years. The American Association of University Professors and the Federal employee associations, despite a history of bargaining dating at least since the early 1970's, are still in many ways in midstream. Limited statutory bargaining rights have hampered Federal employee groups, while the AAUP in some respect faces the opposite problem. A unique system of faculty governance has long existed which gives professors more influence over their working conditions than most other groups of employees. This degree of influence, combined with light teaching loads, lengthy summer vacations, and relatively good pay, naturally diminishes the

attractiveness of collective bargaining. Finally, the National Association of Social Workers shows no interest in bargaining for its members, partly because it represents the elite of the profession.

For associations that have merged with existing labor unions, often under the duress of raids, it is important to assess whether the membership has benefited from the absorption. Virtually no research exists on this question, but the possibilities of economies of scale in large organizations would enable them to offer potentially more effective representation.

With the association well running dry, future Government unionization is now much more dependent upon the old-fashioned campaign of organizing the unorganized. However, the prospects of organized labor meeting this challenge are not promising. For example, the States without bargaining laws are mostly Southern and Mountain States, where even successful enactment would have limited effects, if the experience in the private sector is any indication. The proportion of Government workers represented by unions or associations that have adopted collective bargaining dropped from a peak of 45.5 percent in 1983 to 42.5 percent in 1987, before rising slightly to 43.6 percent in 1988. Thus, there is even a possibility that public-sector unionization may be beginning a decline similar to what has been happening in the private sector for over three decades. □

Footnotes

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Issues confronting employers

It is not possible to attach a precise magnitude to the relative importance of each and every factor that affects the differences in wages and employment opportunities between males and females. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence provides some guide for the potential role of different policies, specifically: (1) at least some of the differences in wages and the occupational distribution of males and females reflect discrimination in the labor market, suggesting a potential rationale for policy initiatives for that reason (as well as to redress an inequality of outcomes); (2) occupational segregation accounts for more of the earnings gap than does discriminatory pay differentials within the same job and establishment, implying a larger potential role for equal employment opportunity (including affirmative action) and comparable worth as opposed to conventional equal pay policies; (3) because differences in pay across establishments and industries account for a substantial portion of the gap, this severely restricts the scope of policies like equal pay and comparable worth, both of which are limited to comparisons within the same establishment; (4) a substantial portion of the earnings gap reflects decisions made outside the labor market, thereby limiting the scope of labor market policies.

—Morley Gunderson
"Male-Female Wage Differentials and Policy Responses,"
Journal of Economic Literature,
March 1989, pp. 67–68.