

TEACHERS' UNIONS IN HARD TIMES

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“How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

II Samuel, 1:26-27

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s and 1980s, teachers' unions in Michigan and Pennsylvania were among the most powerful in the United States. They won rapid and substantial gains for their members, in large part because of their readiness to send teachers out on strike, and they played a dominant role in school politics and state politics more generally. With the election of activist Republican Governors in both Michigan and Pennsylvania in the 1990s, however, the power of the teachers' unions began a precipitous decline. They now find themselves in an extremely weak position in both states. Rather than being the protagonists of reform they are by-standers at the reform parade, and even at times the objects of reforms initiated by their political adversaries.

In Michigan, Governor John Engler and his allies have devoted considerable political energy to reducing the power of teachers' unions, portraying the unions as obstacles to needed changes in the educational system and justifying their attacks on the unions as essential steps toward educational reform. Michigan's teachers' unions have played into this strategy, and arguably made their own situation worse, by responding to political attacks with transparently political counterattacks, by predictably and vehemently opposing proposals for educational change put forward by their political rivals, by insisting that educational improvement necessarily requires more money for the public school system, and by defending the claim that an attack on the teachers' unions is the same as an attack on public education. This last claim has been

significantly undermined, however, both by the concerted efforts of the Governor to deny it and by the unions' past adherence to a strategy based on frequent strikes and "political hardball." In Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Ridge has argued that the whole public school monopoly needs to be opened up and made more efficient, effective, and accountable. Rather than attacking the teachers' unions directly, he has pursued policies which implicitly damage the interests of the public school establishment, ignoring or by-passing unions and other defenders of the status quo in the process.

Neither Governor Ridge nor Governor Engler has seen any need to enlist the unions as partners in advancing their reform agendas, which include expanded opportunities for parental choice and an enhanced state role in setting and enforcing academic standards. For their part, the unions in both states have failed to advance a politically viable alternative to the reform strategies favored by their adversaries. Their energies are largely devoted to protecting their members against erosion in their economic position, and to defending the public school system against the threat of vouchers. As the unions' power has diminished, however, their capacity to accomplish either of these ends has fallen into some doubt.

If the ultimate goal of educational reform is school improvement, the Governors' strategy depends for its ultimate success on the recruitment of teachers to the cause of reform, independent of their unions. (If the goal is to weaken the "public school monopoly," on the other hand, there is no need to recruit teachers at all.) The question that remains to be answered is whether teachers will rally to the cause of school improvement when the reforms championed by Governors Engler and Ridge appear likely to bring them less job security, closer evaluation, and reduced salaries and benefits. We address this question in the concluding sections of this paper.

MICHIGAN: LOSING BATTLES

The recent history of teachers' unions in Michigan is a history of defeat and decline.² In the late 1960s and 1970s, strengthened by new legislation on collective bargaining for public sector employees, the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and the Michigan Federation of Teachers (MFT) won dramatic gains in salaries, benefits, and job security for their members. These gains were won in substantial part through the unions' exploitation of an expanded right to strike, in conjunction with pattern bargaining that sought to match gains won in one district (often after a strike) with similar gains in neighboring districts. Between 1967 and 1980 there were 454 teachers' strikes against public school districts in Michigan, an average of almost 35 per year (Citizens Research Council, 1994).

In the 1980s the strikes continued, at a somewhat diminished pace (18 per year, on average), and teachers' salaries continued to rise rapidly. In addition, the MEA established itself as one of the dominant forces in Michigan politics, assuming "Godzilla-like" pre-eminence within the state Democratic party (McDiarmid, 1993). In 1993, for example, the MEA was reported to have provided more than \$1.4 million in political contributions to candidates and causes in the preceding year, including more than \$900,000 for Democratic candidates for the Michigan House of Representatives (Farrell, 1993). The union was also identified as one of the two most powerful lobbying organizations in Michigan, along with the Chamber of Commerce (*Inside Michigan Politics*, 1993).

The political fortunes of Michigan's teachers' unions took a decisive turn for the worse in 1990, however, when John Engler upset James Blanchard to win the gubernatorial election. Engler's animosity toward the MEA was and remains one of the abiding principles of his political career. From his first election to the Legislature in 1970, Engler sought two main goals: to reduce property taxes, and to reduce the power of the teachers' unions. According to one observer of Michigan politics,

. . . I think that [Engler's] anger began more as a matter of outrage and resentment against the MEA and its power. And the idea that the big unions were controlling so many legislators—and in particular the majority party—and ramming through all this legislation. And the teachers were getting more and more, higher and higher salaries, more and more benefits. And that, furthermore, they were constantly funding Democratic campaigns. . . The guy immediately started to work up a real hate and it's never abated.

In the Governor's office Engler worked systematically to reduce the power of the MEA, carrying forward the campaign that he had begun in the Legislature. For its part, the MEA opposed Engler's education policy initiatives at every opportunity, and mobilized to defeat him at the polls. A full year before the 1994 gubernatorial election the MEA's Executive Board took the unprecedented step of meeting and resolving to reject Engler as a candidate for re-election. Having chosen to play "political hardball" (in the words of Lieutenant Governor Richard Posthumus), however, the MEA suffered some major losses as Michigan's political environment changed.

Governor Engler's triumph over the teachers' unions is now virtually complete. He and his allies have successfully demonized the MEA as one of the principal obstacles to educational reform in Michigan, and the union's political influence has been significantly diminished.³ Teachers have lost their right to strike, and with it much of their leverage in negotiations with local school boards. Their salaries are effectively frozen, and their benefits are under threat. Michigan's other teacher union has suffered along with the MEA, as an MFT leader acknowledges. "He killed us. He went after the MEA and ended up killing us. We were just an annoyance, not an enemy."

Shifts in state policy

Shortly after assuming the Governor's office Engler fulfilled a campaign promise and put forward a proposal to reduce property taxes and redistribute financial resources in favor of poorer school districts. The MEA organized the opposition to the Governor's "Cut and Cap" plan, which was defeated in a referendum in 1992. Politically vulnerable because of his failure to deliver on his pledge to cut taxes, the Governor recruited the support of his erstwhile opponents including the MEA and put forward a revised plan (the first Proposal A) the following year. Despite nearly universal support from the public school establishment (including the Chamber of Commerce) and the virtual absence of organized opposition, the Governor's plan was once again rejected by the voters.⁴

The urgency of property tax reduction and school finance reform had increased substantially in Michigan when the Kalkaska school district closed its schools in March 1993 (Plank, 1994). The school board and the teachers' union agreed to close the schools three months early rather than make program cuts, after local voters declined for the third time to approve an increase in property taxes to fund school operations. Led by the MEA, Michigan educators portrayed the closing of the Kalkaska schools as a signal that the state government needed to increase its financial support for public education. The President of the union argued that "[Kalkaska] could be any school district in the state. What Kalkaska has done for so many of our citizens is highlight what we said about the crisis being real" (Freeman and Hornbeck, 1993). Governor Engler and his allies interpreted events rather differently, however, arguing that Kalkaska illustrated the selfish and insatiable appetite of educators for additional funds, and their refusal to consider measures to restrain costs or to put the interests of taxpayers or students ahead of their own.

Soon thereafter a Democratic legislator, positioning herself for a gubernatorial campaign, proposed that property taxes simply be eliminated as a funding source for public

schools. Recognizing an extraordinary political opportunity, the Republican caucus supported her bill, and Governor Engler signed it. In the ensuing debate over how to replace the lost revenue, the MEA found itself politically isolated in its advocacy for the restoration of the status quo (Plank, 1994). At the end of a protracted political struggle Michigan voters approved Proposal A,⁵ which shifted the main responsibility for funding schools from local school districts to the state (Plank, 1994; Courant, Gramlich, and Loeb, 1994; Vergari, 1995). The changes initiated by Proposal A decisively altered the education policy environment in Michigan, to the disadvantage of the teachers' unions.

Apart from a significant reduction in property taxes, Proposal A had two main consequences. First, it eliminated school districts' discretionary power to increase their operating revenues, by barring them from raising operational revenues from millages.⁶ As a result, annual revenue increases for all of Michigan's school districts are set in the Legislature, which means that the bargaining space for local teachers and school boards is very narrowly constrained. Boards can no longer go to their voters to fund salary increases for teachers that exceed the rate of increase in legislative appropriations, which means that the cost of the raises awarded to teachers can be directly measured in terms of foregone expenditures in other programs.

Second, Proposal A shifted the basis of educational funding from school districts to students. Under the new funding system, the only way that school districts can increase their revenues is by increasing the number of students enrolled in the district. Moreover, the per pupil subsidies provided by the state are portable, as property tax revenues were not, which opens the way to expanded opportunities for parental choice. In 1994 the Michigan Legislature adopted one of the nation's strongest charter school laws, which was buttressed in 1995 by legislation allowing students to attend schools in other districts than the ones in which they reside. Michigan already has the third-largest number of charter schools in the U.S., after Arizona and California, and the new Republican majority in the Legislature is likely to remove

the present cap on the number of charters that can be issued (Mintrom, 1998). The Legislature may also remove a provision in the interdistrict choice law that restricts transfers to schools within the same county. The strategic importance of the shift in school finance policy was signaled by Governor Engler when he signed the bill eliminating the property tax as a funding source for public schools. At the signing ceremony Engler affirmed that “the power and control the teachers’ unions have had over education policies in Michigan ended this morning” (McDiarmid, 1993).

Emboldened by their victory on Proposal A, Republicans in the Michigan Legislature shortly thereafter took advantage of their temporary majority in the House to push through a bill which directly challenged the power of teachers’ unions.⁷ The bill, known as PA 112, had three main effects. First, it removed a number of significant issues from the bargaining table, making decisions about these the exclusive prerogative of school boards.

PA 112 prohibits bargaining over the policyholder of employee group insurance benefits [a direct blow against the MEA and its subsidiary insurance operation]; the school year starting day; the makeup of site-based decision-making bodies or of school improvement committees; whether school districts should act as an authorizing body to grant a charter for public school academies [charter schools] or a leave of absence to a public school employee wishing to participate in an academy; whether to privatize non-instructional support services or to use volunteers; or the use of experimental educational or pilot programs (Citizens Research Council, 1994).

Second, in the event that negotiations between school boards and teachers’ unions reach an impasse, the Act allows the school board to unilaterally impose its “last best offer” without the agreement of the union. Finally, PA 112 imposed severe penalties on teachers who

strike, including fines of one day's pay for each instructional day they are out of the classroom. Similarly, stiff fines may be imposed on the unions to which striking teachers belong.⁸

PA 112 was presented by the Governor and his allies as a necessary measure to “level the playing field” in collective negotiations and to provide public school districts with the power they needed to contain costs. It was strongly supported by the Michigan Association of School Boards, as well as by business and taxpayer organizations. From the point of view of the teachers' unions, however, PA 112 looked quite different. In the words of one MFT leader, “It was a stake through the heart.”

For teachers and their unions, the damage done by Proposal A and PA 112 was compounded by the Michigan School Code revision of 1996, which increased the statutory number of instructional days for Michigan school children from 180 to 190. In the straitened fiscal environment in which school boards and teachers' unions now negotiate, legislative approval of this change was widely perceived as a further attack on teachers, as there is almost no chance that teachers' salaries will be increased to compensate for their increased workload.

Political Strategy

The political strategy pursued by Governor Engler and his allies has been to draw a distinction between the unions and their members, attacking the former mercilessly while seeking to avoid the charge of teacher-bashing. A Republican member of the State Board of Education explained how this works (Wolfram, 1994):

The struggle between the leadership of the Michigan Education Association and Governor Engler is clearly not a battle about education, but a battle about power.... We must separate the union from the union members in our thinking about educational issues. Individual teachers are concerned with

educational quality.... The leadership of the Michigan Education Association is, and should be, concerned with promoting the political and economic power of the union. When we make this clear in our discussions it will put into proper perspective what the real issues are in the education debate in Michigan.

The strategy adopted by the MEA to respond to Governor Engler's attacks has played directly to the Governor's strengths. In a dramatically changed political environment the "hardball" tactics that had been so effective in the 1980s succeeded mainly in confirming the portrait of the union that the Governor and his allies were attempting to convey. The Governor sought to cast the MEA as the diehard defender of a bankrupt status quo in the public school system, and the MEA obliged him by defending the performance and commitment of public educators against widespread public perceptions of crisis and decline, mobilizing opposition to virtually all of Governor Engler's policy initiatives, and lobbying single-mindedly for additional revenues for schools. Fully absorbed in defending itself and its members against the Governor's attacks, the union failed to identify itself with a positive commitment to change, thereby ceding the "reform" banner to the Governor.⁹

As a result, Governor Engler swept from victory to victory. The power of the teachers' unions in Michigan has been systematically dismantled, and the Governor's other education policy goals—property tax reduction, redistribution of revenues in favor of poor rural districts, charter schools, inter-district choice, school code revision, enhanced state-wide testing—have been adopted and implemented despite the MEA's opposition. Governor Engler plausibly presents himself as an "education governor," strongly committed to reform and the improvement of Michigan's schools. His strategy has been imitated by Republicans across the country, including Bob Dole in his 1996 presidential campaign and Governor Pete Wilson of California in his unsuccessful campaign to win approval of an omnibus package of educational reforms known as Proposal 8.

Engler's lesson in Michigan—that it is possible to take on the teachers without committing political suicide—is resonating in other states.... Attacking teachers as a profession is a loser. Confronting teachers as a labor union, however, can produce political returns by portraying their opposition to such proposals as school vouchers, charter schools, and merit pay as nothing more than defense of the status quo (Mahtesian., 1995).

The MEA has recently devoted its energies to campaigns in the Legislature to guarantee that per pupil funding levels will be maintained at current levels and to make the state's "model core curriculum" mandatory. The former measure would oblige the Legislature to make financial provision for increases in public school enrollments, and would (not coincidentally) cripple any effort to introduce vouchers in Michigan. The latter would require large increases in state funding for schools, because the Michigan Constitution prohibits unfunded mandates; if some school districts were unable to bear the cost of the "mandated" core curriculum the state would be obliged to provide the necessary resources. Neither of these proposals appears likely to win approval in the present political environment. Leaders from the MFT concede that it is "almost impossible" to work with the Legislature, and have begun to exert greater efforts to influence elections for local school boards.

Local consequences

At the local level the unions' bargaining position has been severely undermined, by Proposal A and especially by the "no-strike" provisions of PA 112. "We don't do collective bargaining any more," says one union president. "We do collective begging." The hand of school boards in negotiations has been greatly strengthened, and according to this official boards are taking advantage of the unions' weakness to "kick our butts." Most union locals consequently devote their energies to protecting past gains and resisting takebacks, with retirement and benefits the key battlegrounds. Many have also increased their involvement in

local politics, trying to ensure the election of sympathetic candidates (including some Republicans) to local school boards and to the Michigan Legislature.

According to an MEA leader, “in most places it is no longer an issue of economic gains for members.” His members are seeking “to keep up with inflation, and keep their benefits, but the real issues they’re negotiating over are quality issues, and they’re frustrated.” The “quality issues” identified by this official include reductions in class size, full funding for the state’s model curriculum, and additional counseling and support services for students, all of which would require additional revenues and the employment of additional teachers. In the current political and fiscal environment for Michigan school districts, however, school boards have almost no bargaining room on issues that imply substantial new expenditures. Progress on these issues is simply impossible; negotiations can lead to nothing other than frustration.

Despite the affirmations of the MEA leadership, moreover, local leaders in many districts have continued to seek salary gains for their members, without much success. Teachers’ consequent sense of grievance has been exacerbated by the state-mandated rise in the number of instructional days, which increases their workload without a commensurate increase in pay. The consequence has frequently been a standoff in negotiations, as the prudential obligations of school boards come into conflict with the demands of teachers for real increases in their salaries. These conflicts often focus on efforts by school boards to increase their districts’ fiscal reserves by building up the “rainy day fund.”¹⁰ Such efforts are resented and resisted by teachers, who believe that for them the “rainy day” has arrived, and that financial reserves should therefore be used to improve their compensation. In September 1998 teachers in 41 Michigan school districts were working without contracts.

Teachers are especially frustrated by their loss of the right to strike. As one local president put it, without “the ability to go on strike, there’s nothing we can do.” Meetings with the school board are “not really bargaining sessions,” he explains, because “we have no way to

express our concerns.” On the other side of the bargaining table, board members and administrators are frustrated by their responsibility to hold the line on educational expenditures against the demands of teachers and parents, which has created bitter antagonisms in many districts. According to one superintendent,

I don't think bargaining at a local level fits the current system . . . The Governor is correct that if you give us more, we'll give more away. The local pressure is so great on the board members . . . that to not give [teachers] what they want becomes a real struggle, even though we know long-term that's best. We have lots of dollars to do what we want. It just all goes to salaries.

In a few districts, however, a different pattern has begun to emerge. School boards and union locals, recognizing the common difficulties they face, have begun to work together to address issues of quality and parent satisfaction. One local union president affirms that recent negotiations in her district were marked by a “very collaborative approach,” including a contract provision that ties salary increases for teachers to enrollment increases in the district. “We're very interested in the total picture.... We know what their budget is.” At the same time, however, she makes it clear that collaboration has its limits: “If they tried to take things away, that would be drawing a line in the sand, [which would] posture us in a more militant mode.” It remains to be seen whether this kind of cooperation can be sustained over time, or whether it will emerge in other Michigan school districts.

Summary

For Michigan's teachers' unions, the future looks bleak. They are hemmed in by Proposal A and the financial constraints that it imposes on local school districts, which means that the prospect of winning real economic gains for their members at any time in the foreseeable future is vanishingly small. The unions' power to protect their members against takebacks is increasingly being challenged by local school boards. Moreover, their political power has

eroded badly. The unions face the implacable hostility of Governor Engler and the decline and disarray of the Democratic Party in Michigan. They have played virtually no significant role in recent education policy debates, unsuccessfully opposing each of the innovations (Proposal A, charter schools, enhanced statewide testing programs) that the Engler administration has introduced. Political action to reverse past defeats or obtain new revenues for education is consequently unlikely to bear fruit. As one union leader acknowledged, "If [the members] knew how little the union can do in return for their [annual dues] they would be leaving the union in droves."

Even if one accepts the Governor's sharp distinction between teachers and their unions and concedes the proposition that teachers' unions were an obstacle to reform in the past, the present powerlessness of the unions raises questions about the status of teachers and the future course of school reform in Michigan. On the one hand, teachers remain in a reasonably privileged position in most communities, with secure jobs and respectable incomes.¹¹ On the other hand, they are no longer politically protected, and their conditions of work are deteriorating, as the School Code now requires them to work additional days with no increase in pay. Teachers in some districts have already experienced takebacks. The question that remains is whether the political destruction of the teachers' unions is likely to lead to improved education for Michigan school children.

PENNSYLVANIA: INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DECLINE

Pennsylvania's teachers' unions have not experienced losses as dramatic as Michigan's, but they find themselves in much the same circumstances.¹² Governors Tom Ridge and John Engler have much in common, philosophically and politically, and both were reelected easily in November 1998 at the head of their respective Republican tickets. Pennsylvania's teachers' unions are therefore confronting a political landscape nearly as bleak as that facing their counterparts in Michigan.

To be fair, though, Governor Ridge could be called an "equal opportunity" opponent of the status quo in public education. He has consistently pushed for vouchers and charter schools, and has treated all public education groups, not just the teachers' unions, with suspicion and, at times, disdain. Public education groups labor under what some perceive as a "climate of official opposition to public education."¹³ The state's demographics make this possible. Pennsylvania has nearly the oldest population of any state, making taxpayers and senior citizens much more important, politically, than families with children in the public schools. Moreover, it has a large Catholic parochial school constituency, to which Ridge is committed, both politically and by his background. One of his original campaign promises was to obtain vouchers to aid parochial schools, and he has twice tried without success to pass a voucher bill.

At the beginning of Ridge's administration, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) was treated like enemy territory. Ridge appointed an "alien" from outside the world of public education as its head. Within PDE, agency staff were ordered not to speak in public without first obtaining approval from PDE's Press Secretary appointed by the Governor. Ridge's assumption of "client capture" of PDE also extended to the House and Senate education committees in the Assembly. For several years he ignored or by-passed them, even when they were chaired by members of his own Republican party. For example, Ridge's KIDS I and KIDS II education reform bills by-passed the education committees, as well as the key education interest groups. Ridge tried to push these reform packages through the legislature without amendments, and both failed to obtain the necessary votes. After these early setbacks, however, most of Ridge's education initiatives have succeeded.

Evolving Sources of Influence

As in Michigan, the 1970s and early 1980s were times of great power and success for Pennsylvania's teachers' unions. Act 195 of 1970 legalized teacher strikes, and the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers

(PaFT) took full advantage of this. In the twenty-two years between 1970 and 1992--when Act 88 was passed to restrain teachers strikes--there were 811 strikes in Pennsylvania's school districts (634 teachers strikes and 177 classified employee strikes).¹⁴ Since 1992, the number of strikes has declined sharply, from 36 in 1992 to only nine in the 1997-98 school year. The political backlash against teacher strikes that produced Act 88 was augmented by anger in the early 1990s over a trend toward the use of "selective strikes." Such strikes maximized disruption by being announced unpredictably, at the last minute, and involving only selected schools within school districts.¹⁵

Act 88 established mandatory timelines for bargaining, new impasse procedures, a requirement of a 48-hour notice before strikes, and measures allowing substitutes to be used during strikes and ensuring that no strike prevents completion of the required 180 days of instruction annually. The teachers associations feel that Act 88--like PA 112 in Michigan--has tipped the scale heavily in favor of management, enabling school boards to force teachers to work without a new contract. Indeed, in 1998, there were 85 contracts unsettled from 1997, 18 unsettled from 1996, 6 unsettled from 1995, and one still unsettled from 1994. As a result, PSEA wants binding arbitration to replace the non-binding version included in the Act. Not surprisingly, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), which sponsored the Act, is delighted with it and opposes binding arbitration.

Although PSEA's bargaining power has been greatly diminished by Act 88, and by the general political and economic climate in which it finds itself, it still exerts influence through its vast grassroots network, and its ability to make campaign contributions and mobilize campaign workers and votes. Its research and information services, which in the past used to be unequaled, are now matched by the capacities of other interest groups, organizations and think-tanks, such as the conservative Commonwealth Foundation. Endorsing candidates (usually Democrats) and making campaign contributions carry risks, of course. For instance, when PSEA unsuccessfully opposed the reelection of Republican Governor Richard Thornburgh in

1982, and endorsed his Democratic opponent, the union was excluded from all of the administration's meetings with education interest groups during Thornburgh's second term (Karper & Boyd, 1988).

From Offense to Defense

In the 1970s, it was remarked that PSEA had discovered that "it is easier to control one state legislature than 550 local boards" (Hess, 1980, p. 66). Now, however, other equally powerful interests are competing with PSEA for the votes of legislators. Moreover, with the Republicans controlling both the Executive and Legislative branches, the issues getting voted on are different. The teachers' unions, and often other education interest groups as well, are on the defensive now, not the offensive. Indeed, in the last few years PSEA has begun to lose on important legislative votes for the first time. So, much of what PSEA and PaFT now do is to try to protect the gains they made in the past.

One area where they have been rather successful in defending their interests so far is teacher certification and continuing professional development.¹⁶ The fact that they are having to defend, rather than advance, their interests in such matters, however, is indicative of just how far they have fallen. As a legislative staff member remarked recently,

Five years ago, the General Assembly wouldn't even have considered tenure and sabbatical changes. PSEA thought they could get the sabbatical law the way they wanted, but didn't. They also were violently opposed to charter schools. Like New Jersey, they wanted to have the law require certified teachers in charter schools [but had to give some ground on this].

If Pennsylvania's teachers' unions still have some influence over bread-and-butter issues concerning their work, as in Michigan they have been become mostly irrelevant to the big school reform issues of the day, such as charter schools and academic standards.¹⁷ The latter issue

illustrates how Governor Ridge was able to by-pass not only the unions, but also the Assembly's education committees. Rather than supporting and lobbying for an academic standards bill introduced by the Republican chair of the Senate Education Committee, Governor Ridge instead launched a successful end-run around the legislature and the education interest groups, through the appointment of an Academic Standards Commission (Makosy, 1998). The weakness of the teachers' unions was shown vividly here. The Commission had only one teacher on it, a young woman whose main qualification seemed to be that she was a former Miss Pennsylvania.

In contrast to the open process for developing academic standards championed by the State Board of Education, Ridge's Standards Commission operated with great secrecy, which proved to be a tactical advantage. The task forces of professional educators involved in proposing the specifics of academic standards for the various disciplines were dismayed to see their proposals undergo radical surgery at the hands of the Commission and its envoys. What ultimately emerged were not the progressive curriculum standards they envisioned but rather traditional standards that had been reviewed and revised by conservative curriculum consultants from out of state (Makosy, 1998).

The Battle Over School Funding

Another major issue illustrating Governor Ridge's power, and the weakness of the unions and other mainline education interest groups, has been the continuing battle over state funding for public schools. This battle is interesting because it set the stage for the "Kalkaska-like" crisis being played out in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's one really large city. From Philadelphia's point of view, it is a story of rural and suburban interests versus urban interests; and of poor and advantaged whites versus poor, urban blacks. It is also a story that reveals the profound political shifts that are occurring in urban school systems.

In July, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools' (PARSS) long-running court case challenging the constitutionality of Pennsylvania's system of school finance--its equity and adequacy in regard to the Constitutional promise of a "thorough and efficient system"--was dismissed by the Commonwealth Court. However, this case, plus a similar one brought against the state by the Philadelphia school district, now will be heard by Pennsylvania's Supreme Court.

If PARSS has failed judicially so far, Michael DiRaimo, a lobbyist for the Pittsburgh school district, contends that its case has been successful politically.¹⁸ Soon after PARSS brought its lawsuit in 1991, Pennsylvania's "Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education" (ESBE) formula system was frozen and replaced by an ad hoc system in which new dollars are added to it each year. Rather than being allocated by the formula, these new dollars are fought over each year, and in the first several years rural and suburban interests prevailed over urban interests. The ESBE formula gave priority to districts where there were high concentrations of poverty. By contrast, the new ad hoc approach has favored low wealth and low expenditure districts, i.e., poor white, rural school districts (Reis & Hartman, 1997). Put another way, the limited additional state money has been allocated more to reduce expenditure disparities than to address the "difficulty of the educational task" (Reis & Hartman, 1997). The result, according to an analysis by the Council of Great City Schools (1998), is that poor, black, urban districts now get less of the new money than poor, white, rural districts. So, the Philadelphia School District is contending, in a new Federal Civil Rights lawsuit, that Pennsylvania's education funding is now racially discriminatory. According to its complaint, "the result of the changes in the formula has been a shift of Commonwealth treasury revenues away from Philadelphia schools . . . which the Commonwealth Defendants knew or should have known represents a disproportionate allocation of funds away from the largest concentration of minority students in the Commonwealth."

This alteration of the ESBE system has added to the funding woes of the big cities and contributed to the mounting fiscal crisis faced by the Philadelphia school district. Believing that his district could afford no further cuts in spending, in February 1998, Philadelphia's superintendent, David Hornbeck, asked the legislature to make up a projected \$55.2 million budget shortfall for the 1998-99 school year. To get their attention, he warned that if this money was not forthcoming, he would have to close Philadelphia's public schools as early as March 1999.

Governor Ridge and the Republican leadership of the legislature viewed Hornbeck's proposal as blackmail, and as both a threat and an opportunity. With relish and alacrity, they drafted a draconian bill that would allow the state to take over the Philadelphia school district if Hornbeck were to pursue his threat. All the unions opposed this bill, but it passed easily, despite its numerous incendiary features, such as provisions for replacing the school board and superintendent, suspending the teachers contract, laying off teachers, and, in the words of the PaFT, "unilateral school closings and privatization by converting public schools to charter schools without approval by teachers and parents".¹⁹ It was then Philadelphia's turn to be "motivated" to find a way to avoid school closure and state takeover. Rather than cutting the proposed school budget, an 11th-hour solution was found when two local banks issued the district letters of credit enabling it to borrow \$250 million to keep operating through June 1999 (White, 1998).

Underlying Philadelphia's crisis and the Legislature's takeover bill are momentous political shifts that are redefining not only the politics of urban education but, more broadly, the character of state and national politics. A new coalition is emerging between traditionally Democratic African-Americans and the Republican party. Both share a conviction that the unions will never make the changes necessary to rescue urban education. Remarking about this, a legislative staff member noted that,

Louis Farrakhan's representative in Philadelphia, Rodney Mohammed, made an impassioned appeal for vouchers as part of the Legislative Commission on Urban Restructuring's recommendations for urban education. We know, he said, that the Democrats aren't going to take on the unions and really change things. [Thus, House Majority Leader] John Perzel [a Philadelphia Republican] and Rep. Dwight Evans [an African-American Democrat from Philadelphia] have become very unlikely allies.

Indeed, Dwight Evans was among the legislators pushing for the passage of the Philadelphia takeover bill, for which he earned the ire of Philadelphia's unions. They previously had supported him, but spent heavily in an unsuccessful effort to defeat him in the Democratic primary last May. Evans is a leading contender to succeed Mayor Rendell next year, and has come out in favor of vouchers and of transferring responsibility for education to the mayor's office (Wall Street Journal, 1998).

In sum, Pennsylvania's teachers' unions face an uncertain and challenging future. The conservative Republican tide is still strong and Governor Ridge will no doubt try again for a voucher bill after his reelection. To make matters worse for the unions, Ridge's chances of success seem to be increasing, as the unions' traditional sources of support are likely to become further divided and eroded. Polling data suggest that support for school choice is growing among union members as well as among African-Americans, in part because of an increasing divide between public and private sector union members (Wall Street Journal, 1998). In this regard, the Wall Street Journal (1998, p. A14) notes that "the wage gap between public sector and private sector salaries is larger in Pennsylvania than in any other state. In 1995, the average teacher in the state earned \$46,000 for nine months work, while the average salary for all workers was \$27,900." This kind of disparity makes it harder for the teachers' unions to avoid being perceived (at least by a growing segment of the population) as advantaged special interest groups, rather than being seen, as they wish, as the champions and defenders of public

education. This leaves their leaders and strategists facing a difficult political and public relations problem.

THE POLITICS OF THE “NEW UNIONISM”

The changes that we have described in the position of the teachers’ unions in Michigan and Pennsylvania appear irreversible, part of a secular trend defined both by the general loss of confidence in many of our society’s institutions and by the decline of industrial unionism and its preferred strategies for advancement. Some analysts, (e.g., Mitchell and Kerchner, 1983; Kerchner and Mitchell, 1988) see the present moment as transitional. Positing a generational theory of development, they predict that teachers’ unions will evolve into hybrid organizations typically characterized as “professional unions.” They recognize that traditional unionism continues in the mainstream, and is institutionalized in labor law, organizational culture, and in the interests and cognitions of many union leaders, but they characterize such forms as ultimately vestigial. As evidence of evolution they point to such vanguard developments as joint union-management committees, educational policy trust agreements, and contract waivers that promote innovation at the school level. Instances of these emerging practices in such locales as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Toledo, and Columbus, Ohio; Rochester, New York; and Glenview, Illinois are said to constitute the leading edge.

Other developments abet these tendencies. Most notably, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), launched in 1986, enters its second decade in reasonably good health. With two thirds of its membership made up of teachers (equally divided among the NEA, the AFT, and “other” teacher associations such as the NCTM), the NBPTS has emerged as a powerful champion of the professional theme in teaching. Its standards and assessments constitute not only a representation of knowledge and skill in teaching, but a practical means to institute performance-based compensation (see Odden and Kelly, 1997); to organize teacher professional development (see Ingvarson, 1998); to identify teacher leaders; to

rationalize the curriculum of teacher education; and to introduce greater rigor and relevance into initial teacher licensure (see the work of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [INTASC], supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers). Likewise, although the merger of the NEA and the AFT suffered a setback with the NEA vote in the summer of 1998, the prospect remains alive, substantially driven by the common interest of the two unions (at least at the national level) in increased professionalism.

These developments may indeed be harbingers or portents, but the state level political developments described in our case states give pause. Writing some years ago, McDonnell (1989) identified a fundamental obstacle to the development of successful state teacher policies. Such policies, she argued, must accommodate two different, yet legitimate values—popular control and professionalism:

Popular or democratic control requires that schools, as public institutions, be held accountable to the citizenry and its elected representatives. This form of accountability assumes that public officials have the right to impose on schools and those who work there a set of performance standards consistent with the norms and expectations of the larger community. Professionalism assumes that because the members of a particular profession possess a specialized body of knowledge and have been judged competent to practice that profession, they should be free to decide how best to serve their individual clients. In other words, accountability should be based on norms and standards collectively defined and enforced by peers. In their pure forms, these values each suggest different modes of governance and accountability for education (McDonnell, 1989, p. v).

In Michigan and Pennsylvania, teacher policy has lately shifted decisively in favor of popular control, in significant part because the states' teachers' unions were widely perceived to

have deployed the banner of professionalism in order to advance the material and political interests of their members rather than to improve the performance of schools. Teachers and their unions have consequently been sidelined in current debates about educational reform; strengthening public control and accountability through mechanisms including expanded parental choice and state or mayoral takeovers of public school districts has been put forward as the solution to a host of educational problems.

The dilemma identified by McDonnell has hardly vanished, however. The “new unionism” described by Kerchner and others represents a possible resolution, one in which the competing values of popular control and professional autonomy are reconciled in a common commitment to improved service for the clients of the school system. Progress toward such a reconciliation has been achieved in a few school districts, and both unionists and politicians have acknowledged that moves toward enhanced professionalism among teachers and increased cooperation between professionals and the broader public are essential to the tasks of improving schools and school outcomes. We share this view, and salute the promise of the “new unionism,” but we are nevertheless pessimistic about the likelihood of a widespread move in this direction. The politics needed to reconcile the values of public and professional control plainly have not emerged in Michigan or Pennsylvania, nor is there much prospect that they will any time soon.

To see why, we need to explore in greater depth the competing interests represented in the contest, along with the incentives and risks facing the respective players. On one side of the table, powerful interests within the teacher union movement seek to preserve and advance the traditional strategies and postures that have secured gains in the past. This is understandable, first from an historical perspective. An entire generation of union leaders and staff, especially at state and local levels, has made careers out of mastering the processes of local collective bargaining and state-level lobbying for teacher interests. In most states, but particularly in those with strong collective bargaining statutes, teachers’ unions acquired considerable political

influence by operating in a largely adversarial and partisan manner. Contract negotiations at the local level and budgetary politics at the state level were treated as zero sum games, and the unions' readiness to resort to strikes, job actions, and hard-edged electoral politics around wages, benefits, job protections, and working conditions produced large gains for teachers. As we have indicated, states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania represent this tradition, but many national staff also have made careers in the spheres of collective bargaining and lobbying. The teachers' unions, then, have a strong vested interest in these strategies around which staff have developed expertise and to which they are committed through a lifetime of work.

The decisive decline of the unions in our case states, however, suggests that these traditions are no longer serviceable. We already have explored the circumstances leading to this outcome, but we can amplify its import. "What's good for teachers is what's good for education" is the claim that always has undergirded teacher demands. Other interests rely on similar claims (What's good for General Motors . . . ; "The business of America is business"). When this equivalence between public and private interest was firmly established in the public mind, the unions were relatively free to pursue an agenda focused on wages and protections for their members. The rhetoric of professionalism was extremely useful to the task of public persuasion, and has been employed successfully over the years. While it would be wrong to assert that the teachers' unions have paid mere lip service to the professional ideal, it is surely accurate to claim that the unions' muscle has resided in their negotiators and lobbyists, rather than in their professional development staff. So, while the unions could point to steady investment in "professional" activities, these were secondary to the primary pursuits of bargaining and lobbying.

In recent years new voices have emerged within the teachers' unions that seek to modify if not transform teachers' collective advancement strategy by drawing explicitly on the professional theme. The vanguard developments already indicated exemplify this strand within the union movement. Union progressives reckon that in order to restore public confidence in

organized teachers, the unions must engage pro-actively in school improvement, and must alter certain traditional features of unionism. These include the shift from distributive bargaining (e.g., dividing the “spoils” of money, power, rights) to integrative bargaining (e.g., seeking mutual benefits and a common agenda), a distinction Koppich and Kerchner (in press) derive from Walton and McKersie (1965); the introduction of peer review into the evaluation of teaching competence; the championing of rigorous professional standards for teachers; and the genuine participation of teachers in school and policy decision-making.

In pursuing these matters, however, union progressives do not seek to overthrow the institutional framework of industrial unionism but to bend it to more professional purposes. They recognize the necessity for some form of collective negotiation and of dispute resolution. They hope, however, to supplement the traditional concerns for teacher rights, wages, and benefits with broader concerns for educational improvement. By creating both the appearance and the reality of direct teacher engagement in professional accountability and educational improvement, they hope to enhance teachers’ cultural authority as well as their economic status.

Union progressives face two main problems. First, in challenging certain cherished tenets of industrial unionism, they incur internal opposition from traditionalists. Peer review is the most obvious instance. Unions protect their members, but peer review requires some teachers to sit in judgment over others, potentially affecting their employment. This is a matter of great symbolic import that is deeply divisive (see Kelly, 1998). If teachers do not police their own ranks, they abandon one pillar of professionalism. If they do, they come into direct conflict with worker solidarity promoted by industrial unionism. Second, and equally troublesome, is the political weakness of professionalism as an advancement strategy. Teachers may choose to become involved in school reform, but democratically elected bodies may still choose not to provide sufficient funds to support instructional improvement, yielding large classes, run-down schools, inadequate instructional materials, and meager salaries. They may also enact de-

professionalizing policies that, for example, open the occupation to the unqualified or create rigid bureaucratic structures and processes constraining the exercise of professional judgment.

In such cases, organized teachers require more than persuasion and advocacy to counter the excesses of public control. They must possess some form of political muscle that they can flex, not simply on their own behalf, but ultimately on behalf of their students. Labor law and the institution of collective bargaining, together with political action at the state level, have supplied organized teachers with the principal forms for the exercise of power. While doctors and lawyers were able to convert the professional theme into cultural authority, political power, and highly favored economic position, that path is not open to teachers. Consequently, classic professionalism by itself cannot protect the interests of teachers nor counterbalance the potential disadvantages of democratic control.

The strategic problem for teachers' unions may therefore be framed in the following terms. In the contest over scarce public resources and the control of work, teacher organizations require some basis upon which to mobilize power and influence. Elusive yet vital cultural support for teacher militance in states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania has eroded to the vanishing point. Frontal assaults on teachers' unions now make good electoral politics in these states, leading to new statutes that further weaken the unions. Continuing the strategies of industrial unionism no longer appears to be a viable option. Yet the cultural and political bases upon which to reassert influence have not yet emerged. So, while union leaders, in our view, are correct in asserting the necessity of wielding power in defense of teacher interests, the means that would make this effective are no longer readily available.

On the other side of the table, politicians such as Michigan's Governor Engler or Pennsylvania's Governor Ridge at first glance face no downside in either attacking or bypassing the teachers' unions. The erosion of public support for the unions, the ascendance of the Republican party, and the perceived affluence of teachers conduce to a political climate that

favors anti-union political appeals. Recent state legislation in both states has further weakened the unions' power, so they are no longer as potent an adversary as in years past. Electoral politics, of course, can change as suddenly as the weather, but for the moment there is no cloud on the horizon.

But consider the prospect of serving as an “education” governor who is opposed to the organizations representing teachers. That posture contains its own difficulties. At some point in the chain of logic linking reform ideas to instructional improvement to student learning, teachers are necessarily implicated. As David Cohen (1988) among others has pointed out, one of the troubling ironies of educational reform is that teachers are regarded simultaneously as the source of the problem and of the solution. If student learning standards are vague, weak, and unenforced, then new standards can only achieve effects if teachers use them. If “break the mold” schools established by charter or by private firms such as Edison are to revitalize urban education, those school designs require committed, expert teachers for their realization. If class size reduction appears as a potent state policy, it can achieve effects on learning only so far as the state is capable of recruiting enough qualified teachers.

The strategic problem faced by public officials is therefore that what makes for good electoral politics may not produce good educational policy, when “policy” is construed not as the output of legislators but as the actions of educators—street level bureaucrats in Lipsky’s (1980) phrase. Politicians cannot do without the energetic collaboration of teachers if the long-term goal of improving public school systems is to be achieved; but their short-term interest in restraining public expenditures, strengthening the institutions of public control, and winning elections may preclude the kinds of concessions that would win the trust and cooperation of organized teachers. Permanently alienating teachers may be destructive of their long-term ends, but premature conciliation may surrender the leverage politicians need to encourage educational improvement.

We can frame the problem facing teachers' unions and public officials as an instance of the "Prisoner's Dilemma" game, in which the players must decide whether to act selfishly to advance their private interests or altruistically to achieve shared gains. (See Box.) The mutual dependence between teachers and public officials may argue for partnership between public and professional interests along the lines defined by advocates of the "new unionism," but the mutually beneficial outcome is not available, since for each side the real short-term advantage of opposing the other outweighs the notional benefits of cooperation. Under these circumstances, the predicted outcome is continued standoff, which is unlikely to produce much in the way of school improvement.

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In the longer term, of course, more desirable outcomes may become available.²⁰ Cooperation in the interest of shared gains may come about through the establishment of trust between the players, or through expanded opportunities to communicate with one another about their respective strategies (Axelrod, 1978). In Michigan and Pennsylvania, however, such cooperation will only be achieved in a substantially changed political environment, which is not an immediate prospect. When it comes, it most likely will emerge around two broad policy themes, which we reflect on in our conclusion.

REFORM WITHOUT TEACHERS?

In Michigan and Pennsylvania, as in many other states, two streams of policy are unfolding simultaneously with unpredictable futures. One stream involves the creation of strong standards for student learning and curriculum, together with development of state assessment systems. The other stream introduces new forms of school choice on both the supply and demand side, often in conjunction with the privatization of educational services. Each of these policy streams poses opportunities and impediments for public-professional forms of

cooperation. Each might enhance professionalism in teaching or serve to de-professionalize the occupation.

Higher Standards for Teachers and Students

Consider first the movement to introduce high standards into education. Policy efforts along these lines have emerged at national, state, and local levels around the core academic subjects. Standards constitute a natural point of convergence between public officials interested in raising academic achievement and organized teachers interested in promoting professionalism. Consequently, standard-setting is an inviting activity around which to build common ground. Standards-related policy incorporates attention to curriculum reform, to student learning, to assessment of student learning, to teachers' professional development, to rewards and incentives for performance, and to the articulation of standards for teaching and those for learning. On these matters and on their coordination into systematic approaches to instruction, there is considerable room for teacher involvement at all levels of governance. At the same time, these are public policy issues that also engage the authority of government and the responsibilities of state and local policymakers.

Although these are not the traditional "bread and butter" issues of unionism, the teachers' unions might opt for more aggressive involvement in such issues as part of a campaign to enlarge public confidence and to influence instructional conditions for teachers. Such activity cannot substitute for negotiation around wages, benefits, and job protections, but it can supplement and complement bargaining, and it can assume greater importance in the public posture of unions, particularly as systemic reform includes attention to accountability. This is really the crux of the matter. The traditional union stance allocates teacher evaluation to management and protection of workers to the union. This equation, however, leaves organized teachers in a weak position to advocate for professional standards of practice, if they are unwilling to play a major role in defining and implementing those standards. Peer evaluation is a

critical element of professional accountability, and may constitute a vital quid pro quo in the larger effort to introduce professional standards into schools.

Other policies, however, also serve as starting points for public-professional partnerships around standards. States and districts can begin to make use of national board certification and of NBPTS standards and assessments as a basis for teacher evaluation and professional development, teacher compensation, teacher advancement, and other personnel decisions. The scope of bargaining at the local level can expand, as it has in such vanguard districts as Cincinnati, to incorporate issues of educational reform that may be proposed by either labor or management. And, structural reforms such as site-based management can create conditions under which teachers can exercise greater authority in forming academically-oriented school communities.

Public policy can also contribute to the deprofessionalization of teachers, however. Curricular and assessment mandates developed without teacher input often violate professional standards and judgments. State and district testing systems in particular often create constraining conditions for teachers and students alike, in the name of public accountability. Some state legislatures are even beginning to mandate instructional methods, around literacy instruction for example, where phonics-based approaches have gained favor over so-called whole language methods. In such instances, policymakers clearly reject teachers as partners, viewing them instead as bureaucratic functionaries expected to dispose what others propose. Under these circumstances, both union power and professional suasion appear incapable of exerting influence over curriculum and instruction. Pennsylvania's recent experience with their standards commission is a clear instance of standard-setting as the triumph of public over professional values.

Under present political circumstances, state policymakers in Michigan and Pennsylvania have little incentive to engage directly with organized teachers around standard-setting. This

remains a potential area for resumed dialogue and collaborative activity in the future, to the extent that state policymakers come to believe that reform itself cannot bear fruit without the constructive involvement of teachers. How to engage rank and file teachers in state standard-setting becomes the task, and for that, the professional model may be the best entrée.

Choice and Privatization in the Educational System

The second major stream of policy further complicates efforts to find common ground around standard setting. Many states today, including Michigan and Pennsylvania, also are experimenting with a variety of school choice and privatization policies. There are many varieties of choice policy (see Cookson, 1994, pp. 14-16, for one account) but Michigan, as we have indicated, has a “strong” charter school statute together with an interdistrict transfer policy. Pennsylvania’s charter schools law, passed more recently (in July 1997), is not as strong. Its first year of implementation produced only a few charter schools, since only local school boards could grant charters and no appeals of rejected proposals were allowed until the second year.²¹ The fact that charter schools are now possible has already changed some of the dynamics of educational politics in Pennsylvania, but not much is yet known about the impacts and consequences associated with Pennsylvania’s charter schools (Daniels, 1997).

Having won control of both houses of the Michigan Legislature in the November 1998 elections--and with the U.S. Supreme Court declining to review the Wisconsin State Supreme Court decision that allowed public vouchers for private and parochial schools--Governor Engler and his allies are likely to propose an amendment to the Michigan Constitution that would clear the way for the introduction of a state voucher plan for Detroit and possibly other urban districts. Governor Ridge is similarly expected to try again for a voucher bill in Pennsylvania. As in Michigan and other states, it would be much easier to pass a voucher plan limited to a few big cities in Pennsylvania than one that would embrace the whole state, as the latter would require massive funding and widespread political support. In Michigan, private firms such as the Edison

Project and others now operate a number of schools, including both charter schools and district schools. The main “privatization” venture in Pennsylvania to date involved a controversial effort by the Wilksburg school board to contract out the management of one of their elementary schools (Thomas, Moran, & Resnick, 1996). This effort received moral and legal support from the Secretary of Education, but after some protracted legal disputes was ultimately declared illegal, because the outside management firm replaced the existing teaching staff in violation of the teachers’ contract (Ponessa, 1996; Walsh, 1996; Wills, 1998).

To date, teachers’ unions have opposed choice and contracting policies. They particularly fear the potentially weakening effects of vouchers on the public school system, redirecting resources away from struggling public schools to private schools. Choice and privatization policies also threaten teachers’ organized interests insofar as they encourage the employment of non-unionized and non-certified teachers. For many choice advocates, however, this is the point. They argue in part that choice policy frees schools from many of the constraints that hinder more effective education. Chief among such constraints are the bureaucratic organization of school districts embedded in state regulatory policy and collective bargaining agreements.

Traditional and progressive unionists are of one mind on this issue. If choice and privatization policies weaken standards for entry and for employment of teachers, then they are hostile not only to the interests of unions but also to the advancement of professionalism. On this point, studies-in-progress of charter schools and choice in Michigan by Plank and Sykes contain some anecdotal evidence. By law, charter schools must hire certified teachers, but it appears that many such schools are having difficulty attracting experienced, highly qualified candidates. While such schools may offer greater autonomy and the appeal of a focused, distinctive mission, they also offer fewer job protections, less attractive benefits, and more demanding work schedules to their non-unionized workers. In a number of cases, Michigan charter schools have had to bring in outside management companies to cover cash flow

problems and to provide administrative services. Such companies often become the employers of record; they determine such matters as teacher salary increases, work schedules, and employment itself, because charter teachers lack tenure and typically work on annual or “at-will” contracts that need not be renewed. The freedom teachers may have in charter schools is offset by their vulnerability in many cases, and this trade-off lacks appeal for many teachers.

The involvement of for-profit firms in education raises another issue as well. Firms such as the Edison Project or the National Heritage Academies seek not only to provide better education for students and families, but to do so at lower cost in order to produce profits for their investors. If firms are accountable to stockholders for profits and schools are accountable to parents for educational quality, these two forms of accountability may not mesh. While competition among producers may force automakers, for example, to produce a reasonably good car at a competitive price, the complexity of evaluating educational services makes it more difficult for consumers to judge the quality of what they are receiving. Thus, accountability for profits might take precedence over accountability for educational quality, constituting a wholly new development in American education. How have for-profit firms sought to reduce costs while maintaining educational quality? Again, our evidence from Michigan is anecdotal, but we see a tendency. Firms can most easily economize by (1) achieving economies of scale via “franchising” their school model; and (2) hiring non-unionized employees including teachers’ aides, bus drivers, janitors, secretaries, and food service workers, and offering them lower wages and fewer benefits. To the extent that profits are generated at the expense of other school workers or ultimately teachers themselves, however, organized teachers might be expected to resist.

Choice and privatization policies, then, can be inimical to both union and professional interests, weakening teachers’ influence in school decision-making and undercutting worker solidarity. Yet at least some advocates for choice argue its merits on the basis of supporting teacher professionalism (e.g., Raywid, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990). The typical conditions of

teachers' work in many large, urban districts are deprofessionalizing, if not downright demoralizing. Charter laws create opportunities for entrepreneurial teachers to open their own schools free, at least, of some of the alienating constraints. Chubb and Moe (1990, pp. 86-91), for example, argue that schools of choice under voucher or charter school plans, will feature less bureaucratic oversight from the district level and fewer entanglements from district-bargained contracts. Consequently, there will be greater scope for professional community to form in schools of choice than in schools operating within the traditional public system. In addition to greater freedom from bureaucratic constraints, schools of choice also offer teachers the benefits of small scale, focused mission, and a values match between school faculty, parents, and community. Anecdotal evidence from our studies and others suggests that some teachers have taken advantage of these opportunities. The philosophy and practice of charter schools, then, is not inhospitable to the professional aspirations of teachers. But charter school teachers may wish to retain their membership in teachers' unions, as has occurred in charter schools in other states. Indeed, teachers' unions themselves have begun sponsoring charter schools as part of their own effort to participate in school reform.

At issue is the role of teachers in charter schools, together with their organized involvement in them. Will charter schools genuinely create conditions where teacher professionalism may flourish, or will they more often be thin masquerades for domination by for-profit firms and community interests that seek to control schools for a range of ideological purposes? Will charter schools and contract schools accommodate organized teachers and work within the framework of collectively negotiated agreements that promise parity in labor-management disputes? Or, will they become maverick organizations that continue to hire teachers on annual contracts without the protections of tenure and formal teacher involvement in decisions regarding conditions of employment and work? We see both potentialities unfolding in Michigan's charter schools (with Pennsylvania's charter schools just getting underway), so the issue remains open at this writing.

In her analysis of the requirements for democratic education, Gutmann (1987) has written,

When democratic control over schools is so absolute as to render teachers unable to exercise intellectual discretion in their work, (1) few independent-minded people are attracted to teaching, (2) those who are attracted are frustrated in their attempts to think creatively and independently, and (3) those who either willingly or reluctantly conform to the demands of democratic authority teach an undemocratic lesson to their students—of intellectual deference to democratic authority. A democratic conception of professionalism supports those union claims to educational authority necessary to cultivate a democratically tempered sense of professional mission among teachers (p. 80).

Gutmann argues that organized teachers are an institutionalized counter-balance to the excesses of democratic authority, but she also acknowledges that teachers' unions can secure too much power, using it to their benefit rather than to the benefit of the students they serve. In our case states, the pendulum has swung mightily from strong union influence to near-negligible union influence; if Gutmann's arguments are to be credited, neither extreme is healthy for democratic education. If organized teachers could come together with public officials around a professional agenda that accords weight to both the legitimate desires of the public and the necessary discretion allocated to teachers, this would be the best course from our perspective. The twin policy themes of standards and choice have emerged as the likely foci for such partnership, but each theme contains the seeds of both collaboration and conflict around professionalized conceptions of the teacher's role and of participation in reform by organized teachers.

Along with Pennsylvania, Michigan is an important state to watch, for it represents one kind of future. Unlike in California where districts form charter schools under existing

regulations, including collectively bargained contracts, Michigan has opted for choice policies coupled with other legislation that dramatically weakens teachers and their organizations from the school to the statehouse. If present trends continue unchallenged, increasing numbers of teachers will work in charter, contract, and private schools at the discretion of administrators, corporate directors, and private boards who have little incentive to negotiate with them.

CONCLUSION

Both standards and choice as policy themes contain possibilities for enhancing teacher professionalism and supporting the growth of “new unionism” among teachers, but we are pessimistic about this potential in the short run. Politicians in Michigan and Pennsylvania have discovered real advantages in politics and policies that attack or by-pass unions. They do not need to bargain. They do not need to form public-professional partnerships. They have won the war, and they are in charge. In response, the unions’ may feel their best option is to continue fighting a rearguard action and to wait for a more propitious political environment, rather than searching for détente and common ground with their present adversaries. In this political context, appeals to professionalism carry little weight on either side.

Michigan and Pennsylvania thus represent cases of educational reform in which the purported excesses of organized teachers who acquired too much power and used it to their own benefit have been successfully challenged. Replacing teacher power is a combination of public and market power which has substantially reduced the potency of the teacher’s voice. Whether this new regime will lead to improvements in educational quality or equity remains to be seen, but we have our doubts. Meaningful school reform without the whole-hearted participation of teachers appears an unlikely prospect. How individual teachers respond to the decline of their unions and to their own loss of influence in educational policy debates is therefore likely to emerge as the critical issue for reformers in the coming years.

Endnotes

¹ The authors' names are listed in alphabetical order.

² This section of the paper is based in part on interviews conducted with state-level leaders from the Michigan Education Association and the Michigan Federation of Teachers, and with the presidents of union locals in metropolitan Lansing. This research was conducted in the course of a larger project on "The Ecology of School Choice," which has received funding from the Spencer Foundation and the Provost's Office at Michigan State University. Brad Carl, Sharman Oliver, and Nancy Schwartz provided valuable research assistance.

³ This reflects a broader decline in the political influence of organized labor in Michigan. In the last two gubernatorial elections, the candidate favored by the principal unions has lost in the Democratic primary, and the successful Democratic candidates have been easily defeated by Governor Engler despite strong union support.

⁴ The first Proposal A was defeated mainly because voters in metropolitan Detroit and the urban corridor north of the city objected to the proposed redistribution of school revenues in favor of "outstate" districts.

⁵ Ballot proposals in Michigan are designated by letters. This was the second consecutive "Proposal A" to address school funding issues, following the defeat of the first "Proposal A" in 1993. The second "Proposal A" was substantially more radical than the first.

⁶ Funds for capital expenditures continue to be raised locally, through the issuance of bonds.

⁷ The bill was passed by the House at midnight, with no Democratic votes. One Republican member returned from Venezuela to cast his vote. The bill passed the Senate on a party-line vote a week later, as a Republican Senator returned from a two-month medical absence to cast the deciding vote, arriving on the floor from a hospital bed set up in the Lieutenant Governor's office.

⁸ In September 1999 teachers in the Detroit Public Schools staged a nine-day strike at the beginning of the school year, against the advice of local and state union leaders. The school board and superintendent declined to invoke statutory sanctions against the strikers, choosing instead to continue negotiations. The Detroit school board's failure to enforce available penalties against the teachers and their union produced immediate efforts in the legislature to make the penalties mandatory.

⁹ In the 1998 gubernatorial campaign, the hapless Democratic candidate's education platform calls for a reversal of the funding shifts enacted in Proposal A, and for the repeal of PA 112 and the restoration of teachers' right to strike. It is doubtful whether anyone outside the teachers' unions believes that either change will bring about improvement in Michigan's schools.

¹⁰ From the school boards' point of view, the "rainy day fund" has increased in importance since the approval of Proposal A, because the state aid payments that now constitute the largest share of district revenues are distributed on a schedule that does not correspond to the districts' fiscal or academic years. Those districts without a sufficient fund balance must resort to costly short-term borrowing to meet their payroll and other obligations.

¹¹ Surveys consistently rank Michigan's teachers as the best-compensated in the nation when their salaries and benefits are adjusted for the cost of living in Michigan.

¹² This section of the paper is based in part on interviews with Pennsylvania teacher's union representatives, legislators, legislative staff members, and education lobbyists.

¹³ Joe Bard, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS), used this phrase in the PARSS Newsletter, September 1998.

¹⁴ From 1970 to 1980, there were 352 teachers strikes; from 1980 to 1990, there were 227 teachers strikes.

¹⁵ It is important to note that Act 88 was passed under the Democratic Administration of Governor Bob Casey, which shows that the unions were already losing influence prior to the advent of the Ridge Administration.

¹⁶ PSEA succeeded in opposing Ridge's professional development bill by taking advantage of PSBA's well-established use of the "unfunded mandate" argument. They contended that the professional development bill was going to be yet another unfunded mandate.

¹⁷ The unions were also irrelevant to the biggest education policy controversy during Governor Casey's administration, the donnybrook over outcome-based education (Boyd, Lugg, & Zahorchak, 1996).

¹⁸ Interview with Michael DiRaimo on August 26, 1998.

¹⁹ As quoted in the Wall Street Journal (May 15, 1998). The strong support for this bill reflected the legislature's negative view of Philadelphia as an insatiable and 'bottomless pit,' as well as their antipathy toward the unions and Philadelphia's school superintendent.

²⁰ Relations between Governors and teachers' unions are far less acrimonious and potentially more constructive in other states, including New York.

²¹ As reported in the Harrisburg Patriot on August 30, 1998, thirty-one charter schools were approved for operation in Pennsylvania during the 1998-99 school year.

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BOX: PLAYING “POLITICAL HARDBALL”

The problem facing the Governors and the teachers’ unions can be presented as a game in the form of the familiar “prisoners’ dilemma,” in which the principals must choose whether to fight to advance their particular interests or to cooperate with their adversaries to achieve shared gains. In the original “prisoners’ dilemma” game, two prisoners have been arrested for the same crime. They are placed in separate cells to prevent them from communicating with one another, and separately offered a similar bargain by their jailers. If one betrays the other he will be set free, while his confederate serves the maximum time, provided that his partner does not betray him. If he refuses to “defect” and betray his partner he will serve an intermediate sentence. If neither of the two prisoners “defects,” therefore, both will go free; if each betrays the other, both will serve maximum time. The socially optimal outcome is for both prisoners to refuse to defect, but the equilibrium solution is for both to defect and to serve maximum sentences (Fudenberg and Tirole, 1991; Axelrod, 1978).

We present the conflict between the teachers’ unions and the Governors graphically in Figure 1. The absolute magnitude of the gains (or losses) associated with the choices available

		Unions	
		Cooperate	Fight
Governors	Cooperate	2,2	-2,4
	Fight	4,-2	0,0

to the two players is not important to the analysis. The critical condition is that the payoff for fighting exceeds the payoff for cooperating for each party, regardless of the other party's choice. In Figure 1, for example, if the Governors choose to fight and the unions choose to cooperate the Governors' payoff is 4, which is greater than the payoff of 2 that the Governors would receive if they chose to cooperate. Similarly, if the unions choose to fight, the Governors' payoff is 0 for fighting and -2 for cooperating. The same conditions hold for the unions. Under these circumstances, both players will choose to fight, and the outcome of the game will be (0,0) in the lower right-hand cell. Collectively, the best available outcome is that in the upper left-hand cell (2,2), but this socially preferred outcome is not readily attainable.

From the Governors' point of view, there is little to gain from cooperating with the teachers' unions. Public support for restraining or reducing taxes remains widespread, and in Michigan and Pennsylvania there appears to be further political mileage in attacks on the education establishment. Moreover, the Governors' policy priorities in both states include expanded opportunities for parental choice and stricter accountability for schools, teachers, and students, both of which are strongly resisted by the teachers' unions. Under these circumstances, the Governors' best strategy is to move forward with their reform agendas, confronting the unions when necessary and ignoring them otherwise.

From the unions' point of view, cooperation with the Governors opens up a dismal prospect for their members, including more work for less pay, peer evaluation, stricter external accountability (including tests for practicing teachers and "merit pay"), and reduced job security. In the present political environment it is unlikely that unilateral concessions on any of these issues would produce reciprocal concessions from the Governors; rather, they would almost certainly result in unpredictable but potentially large losses for union members and a further deterioration in the power of the unions. The "new unionism" seems to offer the unions little or no political leverage; their best strategy is to fight to protect their members' past gains, while mobilizing politically to shift the electoral balance in their own favor.

At present it is clear that the Governors hold the winning hand, but this does not mean that it is in their interest to be magnanimous, or that it is in the unions' interest to be conciliatory. The Governors maximize their gains by confronting the unions, while the unions minimize their losses by confronting the ²²Governors. If both were to adopt cooperative strategies like those admired by the proponents of the "new unionism" this might lead to quicker or deeper improvements in educational performance than can be achieved by continued confrontation, but for the moment it serves each individual interest to fight on.

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