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# Unionization and Deprofessionalization Which Comes First?

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UNIONIZATION AND DEPROFESSIONALIZATION:  
WHICH COMES FIRST?\*

ABSTRACT

This paper constitutes a review of the question whether unionization leads to deprofessionalization or whether deprofessionalization occurs first to be followed by union efforts to restore professional status to a profession under attack from social, political, and economic forces, including the bureaucracy. The evidence mustered from the historical literature appears to support the latter hypothesis, although it is questionable whether a union by itself can return an established profession to its original status prior to deprofessionalization.

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## Unionization and Deprofessionalization: Which Comes First?

There are individuals within any profession which tremble at the thought that their professional group might "go union." Unionization is cast as a specter that will irreversibly take hold of one's profession and never let go until the occupation is fully deprofessionalized. Yet, there might be opposing forces within the same profession which see the union as the last salvation to withstand outside pressures - usually conceived as employer control - attempting to deprofessionalize their occupation. The paradox drawn here is perhaps best understood as a question of which phenomenon- unionization or deprofessionalization - comes first. Does a union with its standard operating and value systems, such as collective rather than individual bargaining, wage and work practice standardization, seniority-based reward mechanisms, conflict-based processes, etc., undermine much of what would be considered "professional" about a given occupation? Or, has a profession, or a segment of it, already experienced significant deprofessionalization before it resorts to unionization as the last bastion of hope against forces seeking to destroy its influence in society?

In this paper I shall explore this question of directionality by considering the conditions of professionalism which are affected by unionization as well as the status of a profession both before and after any unionizing experience. Preliminary case data on selected professions as well as literature review will be the primary basis for the analysis. Professionalism will be viewed throughout as shaped by the two definitions most cited in the literature - the attribute and the power approaches. We begin with a discussion of these two approaches.

## Definitional Approaches to Professionalism

Early work among so-called functionalists attempted to distinguish the professions from nonprofessional occupations by citing a set of attributes which would point out the distinctiveness of professional groups. Now known as the attribute approach, the presumption of this approach is that the greater the intensity of each attribute, the more "professional" the respective occupation. Unfortunately, there has never been complete accord on the precise list of attributes, but among those most mentioned have been the following six (Kerr, Von Glinow, and Schriesheim, 1977; Raelin, 1984b, pp. 4-6):

- |    |                |   |  |
|----|----------------|---|--|
| 1. | expertise      | - | engaging in prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge   |
| 2. | autonomy       | - | possessing the freedom to choose the examination of and means to solve problems  |
| 3. | commitment     | - | showing primary interest in pursuing the practice of one's chosen discipline   |
| 4. | identification | - | identifying with the profession or with fellow professionals through formal association structures or through external referents |
| 5. | ethics         | - | rendering service without concern for oneself or without becoming emotionally involved with the client                           |
| 6. | standards      | - | committing oneself to help in policing the conduct of fellow professionals   |

Recent sociological research (see, e.g., Rothman, 1984) has begun to challenge the attribute approach as not sufficiently dynamic or process-oriented, and hence has offered an alternative definition, known as the power approach. Accordingly, professionals purposely differentiate themselves from other occupations by using political and social influence (for example, through professional associations or unions) to advance the status of their occupation (Johnson, 1972; Klegon, 1978). The net effect of a power process would be

that the professional group in question would be able to exercise a monopoly over the provision of its expert services while enjoying relative freedom from external intervention. Accruing from this influence might be the opportunity to sustain a superior economic position in the marketplace, leading potentially to higher salaries or income. Within an organization, the power approach refers to any attempt to maintain occupational control. For example, professionals may show that their technical contributions are sufficiently indeterminate that no one else can make them. They may fend off incursions from other occupations or para-professional groups that attempt to substitute for their practice in some way. Hence, professional groups which maintain relative control over their occupation vis-a-vis both their clients as well as their employing organization would be considered to be more powerful or more "professional" than those with less control of both types.

Although proponents of the power approach have argued that it has supplanted the attribute approach, I would prefer to integrate both as the best explanation of professionalism. Professionalism thus refers to a status or level of an occupation that claims a relative amount of exclusivity in its provision of services. Certain methods and standards are associated with the profession. This differs from "character" which embodies a less restrictive criterion. "Professionalization" is the process of becoming a profession or staking one's claim to professionalism. Although the act of professionalizing an occupation is most compatible with the power approach (as in politically agitating to establish an occupation in the public's eye as critical and exclusive), it may also adhere to the attribute approach by, for example, establishing a code of ethics to ensure that its members follow established standards.

Turning, finally, to deprofessionalization, it follows that some occupations may over the course of time lose partial professional status due to a loss of the value of professional attributes or to a relative inability to mobilize political support in behalf of the profession. In some instances, the deprofessionalization results from natural causes, such as social, economic, demographic, or political trends, although power proponents would argue that professional groups have the means to counteract these trends. Continuing with this same approach, a profession may become deprofessionalized by not sufficiently coping with a decline in the importance and vitality of its services (as in the case of the clergy) or with

well-constituted challenges by clients, other occupations, or social and consumer groups to its monopoly over such practices as admission, training, and licensing. The attribute approach may also account for deprofessionalization; for example, a profession may lose mastery over its own knowledge base, or its ethical standards may be compromised by self-interest or narrowly vested group interests (Toren, 1975).

In this paper, we are concerned with the effect unionization may have on either conception of professionalization. Before proceeding to that question, it may be helpful to elaborate on the meaning of unionization.

#### A Legal Interpretation of Unionization

As opposed to professionalization, where definitions may vary on sociological, even ideological grounds, unionization has a more concrete definition in the United States, arising from its institutional and legal status. Unionization refers to the process of establishing and sustaining a union or labor organization. According to the Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act, the labor law of the United States, a union refers to "...any organization of any kind, or any agency or employee representation committee or plan, in which employees participate and which exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work [Section 2(5)]." Although not specifically addressed in this definition, it is clear that a union must also be a permanent employee association rather than one temporarily installed to address a particular set of issues.

The LMRA further distinguishes between professional employees and general employees, using a definition based primarily on the attributes of expertise and autonomy. The reason for this is that professionals are accorded the right to be separated from nonprofessional employees and may choose to be represented by a professional association (composed exclusively of professionals) or by a rank-and-file union. The difference between a professional association and union has become blurred over the years as many

associations have adopted trade union tactics and functions. The historical difference, however, follows from the above legal definition which stipulates that a union exists for the purpose of bargaining with an employer. Professional associations or societies have traditionally focused their efforts on professional development and growth (Owen, and Finston, 1964). They have seen as their main motives the need to guarantee to the public some measure of the professional's competence, the need to maintain high standards of professional character, and the need to raise the social status of their membership (Carr-Sanders, 1966). They have tended to support individual over collective action, however, and have eschewed any connection with such tactics as the strike. Most professional associations also admit managers as well as independent practitioners into their ranks. Finally, in the past, unions were considered by professionals to be of lower status than professional associations due to their promotion of the presumed baser values of individual earnings and working conditions at the expense of stands in the public or client's interest (Kocka, 1980). Through such exclusionary practices as licensing, minimum fee schedules, and preclusion of advertising, however, professional associations have indirectly sustained economic benefits for their members.

#### The Effect of Unionization on Professionalization

When we put our two constructs together, we find most accounts depicting a negative effect of unionization on professionalization. Unfortunately, many of them assume that any particular profession facing a unionizing drive is either at the peak of its power or at least at a steady state. This is typically far from reality, as I shall subsequently demonstrate. Nevertheless, taking some of the critical accounts at face value, we can point to a number of deprofessionalizing effects of union behavior. Most of these effects can be traced to a deterioration in the attributes contributing to professionalism. Clearly among the most negative would be the dampening effects on personal autonomy and initiative resulting from the union's operational values of standardization and uniformity (Kochan, 1980; Kirmeyer and Shirom, 1980). Professionals tend to sustain an intense individualism and ambition and hence may fear any collective system which would not reflect the individual's responsibility, performance, or qualifications (Kornhauser, 1962, p. 108). This of course bears on seniority under which a union may be viewed as protecting the less capable by compressing



salary differences. Hence, the professional's initiative in pursuing excellence in his or her field according to the highest standards of practice may be compromised. Indeed, professionalism tends to be equated with merit-based practices, whereas unionism is viewed as seniority-based.

Another critical concern among some professionals opposed to unionism is that the typical short-run considerations of unions regarding wages, hours, and working conditions may discourage or interfere with professional standards achieved through longer-range, innovative methods (Baumgart, 1983). A classic example of this argument is the ceiling on class sizes sought by teacher unions. Although better for the teacher in the short run, maximum class sizes may impede the development of alternative schedules and teaching arrangements which might have salutary pedagogical effects.

Anti-unionists also attack the effect of union behavior on the ethical service ideal associated with professionalism. When one becomes infatuated with the need to fight for one's economic rights in behalf of oneself as well as the union, is there still energy left to consider the true needs of the client? Collective bargaining is also thought to divide members of a profession into hostile camps, especially between those who have administrative duties and their staffs. This has the effect of promoting discord among members of the same profession.

Critics are also skeptical of the coercive tactics sometimes associated with union behavior. Professionals are not necessarily convinced that they must assume an adversarial role in advancing their cause. Betty Hopping (1976) suggests, for example, that professional negotiation is characterized by a humility which is generated by knowing oneself, by dedicating oneself to an overriding service ideal, and by a conviction that all people are human. Collective bargaining, on the other hand, may view the exercise of humility as an exercise in submission. This issue comes to the fore most dramatically in the practice of the strike. Ellis and Hartley (1980) have bluntly put it this way: "To some [professionals] the actual withholding of services to the public that needs them is abhorrent and is incompatible with personal definitions of professionalism" (p.270). If one is truly committed to a profession based upon resolute service,

then striking in the face of one's client is at best anachronistic.

Finally, it has been suggested that a union tends to undermine the public image of the profession since the public mind may begin to equate the professional with a factory hand (Faia, 1976). Hence, the professional's claim to autonomy or independence from close public scrutiny can be compromised when the special status sought by the professional is left open to question.

#### Deprofessionalization as a Determinant of Unionization

As I pointed out at the beginning of the last section, although unionization can theoretically deprofessionalize an occupation, in reality, an occupation considered to be sufficiently professionalized in the opinion of its members is unlikely to enlist union support. Hence, I can now present my first proposition which is that by the time unionization becomes a viable consideration on the part of certain professional members, the established profession is already facing a decline in its professionalization. I contend that the source of the deprofessionalization is not the presence of a union as much as the occupation's deteriorating economic position and bureaucratization.

I have earlier pointed out that social, economic, demographic, and political forces can serve to deprofessionalize a once pre-eminent profession unless it can amass sufficient power to overcome these forces. Changes in the market for services arising from substitute suppliers, consumer preferences, or macroeconomic conditions can alter the income potential of a profession. Bureaucratic control can also deprofessionalize an occupation. As Larson (1977) suggested, bureaucracy both defines and limits the degree of professionalization in any profession. There is simply not as much latitude of autonomy for any professional when he or she is subject to bureaucratic control. Professionals like to believe that they can establish their own agenda or at least devise their own methods of attacking problems. Yet, the determination of the problems to be examined and the means to be used have to be compromised where professional personnel can be virtually hired, promoted, and fired at the will of the manager (Raelin, 1985). Hence, "salaried" professionals, as they may

be called (Raelin, 1984b), namely, those working in large organizations as opposed to private practice, essentially constitute our upper-level proletariat and represent the natural subset of professionals which are most subject to bureaucratic control as well as union organizing attempts. Managers desire to control them just like other employees and hence will resist any demand, by a professional union, for example, for special treatment. Further, in their attempt to rationalize control over the many competing interests both internal and external to the organization, management will institute formal reporting procedures which may tend further to routinize and depersonalize professional work and compromise standards.

It should be noted, however, that bureaucratization does not automatically limit the influence of salaried professionals (Engel, 1969; Organ and Greene, 1981). Codification of organizational authority, which is sometimes further induced by union activity, tends to limit direct and arbitrary authority by administrators and supervisors (Murphy and Hoover, 1976). Nevertheless, while upholding the collective influence of professionals, standardized rules or contracts in an organization also have the effect of reducing individual professional autonomy.

#### Examples of Unionization in Light of Deprofessionalization

A number of professions have demonstrated an inclination to consider unionization at a point when they face deprofessionalization. Engineering is an apt example. Due to such reasons as their general management orientation, their predisposition as individual professionals who especially eschew collective representation and strikes, and their distaste for negotiation versus objective analysis, engineers have never supported unionism to any great degree (Kleingartner, 1969; Price, 1968; Strauss, 1964). Indeed, in the past, engineering and scientific societies formed collective bargaining units for the precise purpose of fending off organizing of technical professional employees by nonprofessional units. In many instances, when the union threat was deterred, the professional bargaining units were disbanded (Kornhauser, 1962: 103-107). Engineering union participation rates, however, rose to about 5 percent in the mid-50s. In 1953, a number of independents united to form the Engineers and Scientists of America (ESA) which by 1956 had approximately

30,000 members. But what was happening to engineers during this period? Lee Hansen (1963) reported that many began to feel both isolated and underutilized given the sheer size of the organizations they worked for. Further, the salary position of engineers relative to other professionals and even to other workers in manufacturing declined until the mid-50's when a reversal of this trend began (Dvorak, 1963). Finally, many older engineers began to experience a loss of status and salary compared to younger engineers as a result of obsolescence induced by rapid technological change.

By 1961, however, as engineering shortages began to raise relative engineering salaries and opportunities, union activity began to wane. Dissensions within the engineering unions occurred regarding such issues as whether technicians should be included in the bargaining unit and whether a given union should affiliate with the AFL-CIO. In the late 60's and early 70's, union organizing picked up again, especially due to victories by the International Union of Electrical Workers. Here again, the underlying reasons for success were clear-cut. Cutbacks in government aerospace and defense budgets, coupled with a soft economy, produced the highest unemployment in the engineering profession since the Depression (Brown, 1972). Once the recovery set in, the familiar pattern of labor abstinence took hold and has not let up to the present.

The case of musical artists is also illustrative of union organization in light of deprofessionalization. One of the principal organizations, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO-chartered Associated Actors and Artists of America, was founded mainly as a result of the deep-seated desire of solo musical artists to gain some control over arrangements for financial compensation and the conditions under which they performed. At the time of organization in 1936, musical artists reportedly suffered from such bureaucratic control issues as excessive booking commissions and promotional fees, frequent delinquencies or failures to pay performance fees and expenses, inadequate accounting procedures, and requirements for exclusive contracts with booking agents (Fink, 1977).

### Why Unionization?

These cases indicate that unionization emerges when an established profession has already begun to face serious deprofessionalizing encroachments, especially arising out of declines in the power or economic base of the occupation as well as bureaucratic issues of authority and control. Although the forces which can change the power base of a given profession may be social or political, such as when a para-professional challenges the exclusive right of practice of particular elements of a craft or when a client challenges the scope and nature of proposed solutions to his or her problem, the professional may experience the change as a loss of economic potential. Since unions have had a relatively successful track record in presenting the case to employers for the relative contribution of labor versus capital resources, they are naturally considered when professionals experience a deterioration in their power base. Thus, unionization is a strategy employed by a professional occupation based on a power approach to professionalization. The profession seeks to recapture or expand its control over its client base or employing organization. As we shall see, however, full re-professionalization may be impossible since union status itself potentially represents an attenuation of professionalism - at least as embodied by the professional attributes. It should also be noted that the issue of unionization as a means of building rather than restoring professionalism is a separate matter and worthy of study in its own right. In this paper, however, we are expressly considering the deprofessionalization of established professions.

The drive toward unionization under conditions of bureaucratic deprofessionalization has been explored in a theory proposed by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). According to Dahrendorf, conflict over the distribution of authority within an organization leads its members to organize and collectively articulate their common interests, distinguished from their personal interests. As these common interests become manifest, a group forms to further articulate these interests. Those professionals who experience deprivation in their personal and professional autonomy may actually view a union as a legitimate means to oppose the excessive control imposed upon them by bureaucratic authority.

Support for the Dahrendorf theory has come from a number of empirical studies which have shown that pro-union sympathizers among professionals tend to be more "professional" than union antagonists, to

experience relative dissatisfaction and powerlessness in their jobs, and to express a desire for greater authority to govern their work activities (Corwin, 1970; Hellriegel, French, and Peterson, 1970; Jessup, 1978; and Falk, Grimes, and Lord, 1982).

If union proponents among professionals tend to be among the most "professional," then it is natural that these same advocates would strive to point out that professional collective bargaining takes on an expanded scope - in particular, to include issues reflecting distinctly professional concerns. These concerns, to wit, having a company share the cost of participation at professional meetings, the liberalization of company policies governing the publication of scientific results, bargaining for expansion of the merit pool, leaves of absence for professional growth, creation of senior professional positions comparable in pay to some managerial positions, are advanced as equivalent causes along with the traditional union objectives of wages, hours, and working conditions (Kornhauser, 1962; Kleingartner, 1973; Ponak, 1981; Raelin, 1984a). Indeed, consistent with the power approach to professionalism, unionization can promote the cause of a profession by demonstrating to its employer as well as to a more informed public that a professional group can at the same time meet its public obligations while securing its own civil liberties. As stakeholders, including regulatory agencies, continue to make serious inroads into the independence of corporate institutions, unions can work with employers to preserve the domain of professional authority. Even strikes, according to one observer of the health professions, can selectively serve as an important catalyst to convert a rigid bureaucracy into a more flexible democratic organization for all its workers (Badgley, p. 13).

Opposing views of the emergence of unions within established professional occupations typically start by pointing out that professional associations already exist to advance the cause of the professions, in particular, to sustain high standards of distinctive competence. Yet, although the associations are generally effective in supporting intrinsic professional functions, many question whether they can collectively work in behalf of the profession's private economic interests. Paramount in the arguments against associations taking collective action are that their members work in many different kinds of organizations and that, as we pointed out earlier, they have employer officials as well as employees in their membership; indeed, managers tend to

occupy many of the leadership positions in some associations. Further, their standards can have the effect of restricting rather than expanding membership. Finally, many of them are sufficiently diverse and fragmented as to defy unified action (Baumgart, 1983; Kornhauser, 1962; Seidman, 1970).

Nevertheless, as has been the case in some professions, notably teaching and nursing, professional associations have gradually assumed the tactics associated with traditional trade unionism. Labor leaders in the professions see no incompatibility between professional and personal interest; indeed, a labor contract can be an instrument for insuring the highest standards of professional practice (Ellis and Hartley, 1980). An association using union-like tactics can also provide professionals a sense of security as well as re-assurance that a skilled organization is prepared to fight for work place problems, allowing them the freedom to concentrate on more professional concerns. Associations can also serve to uphold professional status by pushing for such benefits as professional release time or by insisting on the maintenance of professional standards in job descriptions. Among some of the issues which have been incorporated into bargaining conducted through the state associations of the American Nursing Association (ANA), for example, have been the establishment of practice committees, programs in staff development, the addition of equipment deemed necessary for patient safety, the adoption of specific standards of practice such as patient care plans, peer review, participation in budgetary processes, and the establishment of joint committees to consider policy questions (Jacox, 1980; Ponak, 1981).

#### Union Effects on Deprofessionalization: Case Examples

Although a union or union-like professional association can be successful in performing many of the previously mentioned life-sustaining functions of a given profession, it is still not clear that unionization can raise the level of an established profession which is already in a state of deprofessionalization. Thus, I can now offer my second proposition which is that unions cannot raise professionalism to a level above where it may have been prior to union organization. Rather, at best, they can prevent further erosion of professionalism. The reason for this is that a union, although successful in resisting economic and bureaucratic

pressures, in its predominant ethos as a collective body fighting for the economic well-being of its members, represents a deterioration of status arising from a perception of lowered professional attributes. Hence, the power approach associated with unionization, in the case of an established and not an emerging profession, although successful on the economic and political fronts, may actually conflict at a certain point with the public's perception of the profession as an autonomous, innovative, self-sacrificing, and even noble group.

The cases of teaching and nursing are most telling along these lines, so I shall go into some depth to trace first the effects of economic and bureaucratic encroachment followed by the results of heightened union activity. These two professions are similar in that both reside principally within large organizations, but beyond pure bureaucratic constraints, they also face such other pressures as government regulations, a female-dominant structure, and subordination to a hierarchy of control some of which is occupied by professionals of higher status.

### Teaching

Although it could be argued that teachers have always had to struggle for occupational and political recognition in schools, the teaching profession fared reasonably well, if not financially, than in terms of prestige in the post-Depression era in the United States. Inspired by the "instrumentalist" philosophy of John Dewey and its concomitant applications of the "child-centered" approach, education of the "whole" child, and "learning-by-doing," public education professed a firm sense of mission (McClellan, 1958). In conjunction with state bureaucracies, teachers also gradually assumed more control over the profession's entrance requirements.

Teacher professionalism continued its upward climb throughout the 50's and early 60's as more young people, especially men, entered the profession. The new entrants, furthermore, were significantly better prepared than their predecessors in terms of advanced education. In 1955-56, the percent of public school teachers with preparation below the bachelor's degree was 22.2. By 1965-66, it had dropped to 7.0 (Stinnett,



1969). In addition, academic freedom, the mantlepiece of professionalism among teachers, conferring on them the right to examine a question freely and to reveal its every aspect, survived numerous legal challenges.

Not that there was total tranquility among educational philosophers and policymakers; indeed the post-War period was one of great ferment, witnessing periodic ascendancies of the countervailing philosophies of the progressives vs. the "back-to-basic" conservatives. A pivotal point in teacher collective bargaining and professionalism was reached, however, during the protest period of the 60's. It was not until then that *most* teachers within a school district voted for union representation and supported a strike, or that a school district formally established collective bargaining with teachers (Jessup, 1985). Perhaps more than at any other prior time, teachers became impatient with what they saw as economic injustice and inequity in light of the advances of competing national priorities and interests (Stinnett, Kleinmann, and Ware, 1966). Beyond salaries, however, teachers also became acutely aware of such bureaucratic incursions as heavy workloads and arbitrary treatment by administrators, school boards, and even state agencies regarding such basic matters as tenure, school hours, days worked, and retirement. In some states, teachers had to submit to controls even over curricular matters, such as textbook selection guidelines or the requirement to use attendance in determining grades or credits (Ledford, 1983). Other complaints centered around their limited participation in maintaining uniformity and standardization in pay and working conditions and around their diminished role in selecting candidates for the teaching field, in accrediting professional schools, in licensing members, and in defining their social service (Engel, 1972; Rotigel, 1972)

Up to 1967, the National Education Association (NEA), formed to deal with the purely professional aspects of teaching, shunned any connection to organized labor, even to the extent of avoiding the use of industrial relations terminology. For example, it would refer to "professional negotiations" instead of collective bargaining, or imposing "sanctions" rather than calling strikes. Teacher discontent mounted, however, as wages in private employment continued to outpace teacher salaries. A pivotal battle for collective bargaining among teachers occurred in New York City. With strong backing from the AFL-CIO, the New York locals of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) merged under the title of United Federation of

Teachers (UFT) and in 1962, concluded a contract with the board of education. The AFT had a history of more militancy than the NEA. Indeed, in 1963, it officially revoked its no-strike pledge.

Recognizing the success enjoyed by the AFT, the NEA fought back from its membership nadir in 1970 by taking on more militant tactics, for example, by itself supporting strikes. Teachers' strikes as a percentage of all government disputes reached a high in 1975 of 45.6 percent. In 1973, perhaps the zenith of NEA unity and confidence, the Representative Assembly voted to accept cash contributions for political action (West, 1980). Throughout the 70s the NEA also sought to consolidate its size advantage over the AFT by consistently rejecting merger offers and by affirming its recognition as an independent professional society which also supports collective bargaining (Rotigel, 1972).

With the exception of recent years, the NEA has maintained a respectable membership rate in the 40 percent range. Meanwhile, the AFT has maintained a steady growth pattern, although lately it has sought to expand its influence by organizing non-teaching professionals, notably nurses.

There is little question that both the NEA and the AFT were initially successful in achieving work environment gains such as class size reductions, the introduction of para-professionals into the system, salary increases, and the expansion of instructional resources; due process reforms, relating to fair treatment of teachers by administrators; and even some professional accomplishments in shaping local educational policy (Rotigel, 1972; Jessup, 1985). It is not evident, however, that such gains as these raised the professionalism of teachers especially when some were won as a result of strikes or actions which have lowered the public image of teaching as a profession. More recently, as declining enrollments have impacted schools within most sectors of the nation, teacher unions have had to concentrate on the most basic of employment conditions of salary and seniority, reducing their image even further to that of the traditional salaried worker.

## Nursing

Nursing has historically had difficulties differentiating itself as a profession due to at least two prominent reasons. For one, nursing education and practice have been dominated by the employer - the hospitals. Secondly, the nurses' role has been downplayed next to the dominant ethos of physicians who often expect nurses to behave only as obedient extensions of their own professional judgment. Nevertheless, it held its ground as a profession in the post-war years through the 60s. Nurses were responsible, themselves, for large numbers of aides and LPNs to staff patient care units, clinical nurse specialists were experimenting with new practice dimensions, the role of the pediatric nurse practitioner (PNP) emerged which allowed nursing to perform many functions traditionally carried out by physicians, and, in general, there was a sense that the nursing role should be extended to include, for example, primary care functions such as routine assessments of health status, care in normal pregnancies and deliveries, and prescription, provision of care, and referrals for selected patients (Bullough and Bullough, 1978; Kalisch and Kalisch, 1978).

Nevertheless, by the end of the 60s and into the 70s, many new economic and bureaucratic forces had emerged to reduce the self-perception of professionalism among nurses. Among them were the employment of less qualified nurses to provide direct patient care, the assignment of nurses to non-nursing functions, greater sophistication of duties unmatched by corresponding increases in salary, overwork created by budget cuts or by cost pressures brought on by third party payment systems such as Medicare, a reward system which has favored managerial over professional nursing functions, pressure exerted on directors of nursing to heed their managerial role and to use their influence to alienate nurses from the American Nursing Association (ANA), and isolation of hospital departments which has inhibited the development of collegiality (Baumgart, 1983; Bullough and Bullough, 1984; Conta, 1972; Colangelo, 1980; Hull, 1985; Ponak, 1981).

Membership in the various state associations of the ANA has been gradually declining from 33% in

1962 to 11% in 1983.<sup>1</sup> The ANA was able to thwart rival unionism primarily because as early as 1944, a ruling gave the state associations the right to engage in collective bargaining *per se*. Membership in the 30% range may have held up through the late 60s due to at least three important events. In 1966, the ANA adopted a nationwide salary goal, which was followed by supportive actions throughout the country, including mass-resignations, sick calls, informational picketing, inter-union battles, and large-scale organizing. In 1967, the NLRB asserted jurisdiction over proprietary hospitals and nursing homes meaning that employees of any home with a gross business volume of at least \$100,000 could petition the NLRB for a secret ballot union election. Finally, in 1968, the ANA revoked its no-strike pledge which gave the state associations, in the view of one commentator, the ability to bring hospital management to the bargaining table (Bullough, 1971). From that point on, the ANA's posture was not unlike a trade union's, especially in its militant approach. Indeed, an empirical study comparing attitudinal militancy among nurses and teachers in the early 70s found nurses to be much more interested in having their association act as a union than as a professional association and to be much more favorably disposed to striking compared to teachers (Alutto and Belasco, 1974). The nursing predisposition to militancy may have gone too far for some nurses as both absolute and relative union participation rates fell until 1974. During this period, nurses not in a bargaining unit negotiated by the state association as well as many supervisory personnel resigned their memberships (Bullough and Bullough, 1984). In 1974, the participation rate of nurses in the ANA peaked in relationship to the remainder of the decade and into the 80s. In the previous year, the ANA had committed substantial resources to a national organizing drive and in 1974, an amendment to the Taft-Hartley Act removed the exemption of nonprofit hospitals from coverage with respect to recognition and collective action. For the first time, all nongovernmental hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, health maintenance organizations, homes for the aged, and other institutions devoted to care of infirm or aged persons were brought under the nation's labor laws (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1984; Colangelo, 1980; Seidman, 1970).

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1. These percentages, however, may misrepresent the organizing activities of nursing since other organizations began to compete effectively with the ANA during this period. Indeed, in some states, the "union" component of the ANA was partitioned as a separate organization. Finally, some bargaining units attracted other professionals or para-professionals besides RNs, while many supervisors and directors, previously the bulwark of the ANA, left the organization.

Nevertheless, the pattern of nursing organization has been one of decline since 1974. This can be partially explained by rival unionism (there are currently some 25 unions and independent professional associations vying for RN memberships), but it is also the case that the taste for professional and collective representation among nurses has lessened. Many do not perceive unions as having been successful in promoting the basic professional issue of improving patient care (Lee, 1982). Those efforts that are being made predominantly fall into the bread-and-butter category, namely wages and working conditions. For example, unions have begun to negotiate seniority systems to prevent unscrupulous personnel cutbacks, such as the layoffs of senior staff and their replacement with less expensive junior nurses. Moreover, it is not clear that the union leadership is altogether interested in re-professionalizing the nursing profession. As a professor emeritus and active member of the California Nurses Association, Margaret Colangelo (1980) advised:

The nursing profession must forget,  
at least for now, concern over whether  
it has achieved true professional  
status and address itself to the urgent  
issues which face it. . . (p. 32)

A recent study by Tilbury (1982) also found that the bread-and-butter issues constituted the overwhelming reason why nurses supported collective bargaining.

### Other Evidence

My observation of union activity in other professions seems to have followed a similar pattern as that for teaching and nursing. When the profession in question is not under attack, it has little need for unions, and those which exist may concentrate on grandiose professional concerns. Once the profession begins to face political-economic and bureaucratic incursions, however, unions or union-like associations seem to fare better as they initially attempt to prevent encroachments on professionalism, followed by basic demands corresponding to the bread-and-butter issues. By the time the union focuses predominantly on the bread-and-butter issues,

significant deprofessionalization has already occurred. No two professions follow exactly the same course, but the pattern seems to be that socio-political and economic forces create conditions for increasing bureaucratization within the profession. Then, once the profession falls prey to bureaucratic control, it may need to fight for more basic economic rights and benefits. Although unions can be effective in this latter realm, it is doubtful whether they can upgrade the professionalism of the affected profession on the basis of its perceived professional attributes.

The case of doctors is perhaps an apt modern example. Private practice has become less attractive in the U.S. due to such factors as a doctor glut in some select cities and specialties, growing competition for patients from corporate providers, malpractice costs combined with lowered earning potential due to government programs, and a taste for a more flexible life-style among younger physicians. Consequently, more and more doctors are choosing to work for a salary. Yet, once ensconced in a health organization, they are finding that their employer, as well as insurers and government agencies, are beginning to participate in and in some cases even dominate over such professional decisions as length of hospital stay, reimbursement rates, election of surgical procedures, treatment plans, ongoing evaluation of competence, and second and third opinions. In order to regain some control, doctors are considering unionization. Within time, the unions may be called upon to assist in less professional concerns, such as compensation. Currently, the Union of American Physicians and Dentists has 43,000 members in 16 chapters nationwide, and its principal agenda is to try to put a halt to some of the inroads made by employers into the profession. Recently, 140 physicians affiliated with a health-maintenance organization in Washington who have their own union staged a 26-day strike to protest management's insistence that they spend more time with outpatients in the office and less time on hospital rounds. Although the strike was settled, hospital administrators remained concerned that the salaried physicians were not sufficiently committed to making the institution financially competitive (Waldman, 1986; Wessel, 1986).

Lawyers have begun to consider the idea of unionism through the formation of such groups as the National Organization of Legal Service Workers and through liberalization of the American Bar

Association's policy toward unionization. This has come about through such recent forces as the lawyer glut in combination with burgeoning caseloads particularly in government bureaucracies, encroachment from other occupations such as real estate and tax consultancy, the proliferation of public law courses and self-help legal manuals and documents, increased client sophistication leading to the now common use of second legal opinions, all of which has made lawyers increasingly and irreversibly susceptible to challenges to authority and autonomy by client groups, organizational superiors, and others with political power (Rothman, 1984; Stern and Murphy, 1980).

Management itself may become a significant barrier to an association's or union's ability to raise the level of professionalism. Once an association wins the right to bargain over bread-and-butter issues, management may become very reluctant to discuss professional practice or client rights issues, citing the latter as a sphere of management's prerogative. Moreover, as Ponak (1981) suggested, the skill of the negotiator may be a factor since it is typically much easier to negotiate over money items and grievance procedures than professional concerns.

Some further support of the proposition that unions cannot by themselves re-professionalize an occupation may be found in the occupational earnings analyses of Rosen (1969) and Cullen (1985), both of which found that the monetary benefits provided by unionization were reserved for occupations with lower levels of data and people complexity. Cullen concluded that unions offer little financial benefit to occupations likely to be among the *accepted* professions - namely, those not yet deprofessionalized.

Finally, in an exhaustive study of unionism among private sector employees, Aronson (1985) reported that union win rates during 1973-79 were higher in professional units than in other units and also maintained their level in professional units while declining in others. However, he attributed this success to the general growth of salaried employment in the professions. "Unionism," he concluded, "may be a reflection of de-professionalization rather than the source of the latter" (p. 362).

Thus, established professions when not under political-economic encroachment and bureaucratic attack are able to do well enough using individual action on the bread-and-butter issues and can deploy their professional association to help them promote professional issues among their employers. It is only when they face deprofessionalizing bureaucratic forces that they may need union or union-behaving associations to stem the tide on professional incursions, followed by defense on the basic issues. However, due to such reasons as the institutional nature of unions, the likelihood of increasing bureaucratic control, the intensified resistance of management, and the collective bargaining process itself which has the effect of attenuating professionalism as embodied in its attributes, it appears unlikely that collective bargaining would concern itself for long or exclusively with professional issues and therein raise the level of any deprofessionalized group to its former status.

## Conclusion

The evidence presented in the foregoing review should be sufficient to draw some preliminary conclusions regarding the relationship between unionization and professionalization as well as to guide subsequent empirical research. The principal agenda is to determine the effects of unionization on professional groups regarding their foci (whether instrumental or professional) and their professional status before, during, and after labor representation. Needed are data which might include information on the content and outcomes of various negotiations or actions (such as work stoppages) in the respective professions. Researchers should be warned, however, that information on the content of union negotiations which reflect professional concerns are extremely difficult to come by using secondary sources. Such references as BNA's White Collar Report and Government Employee Relations Report, for example, although filled with rich case studies, focus primarily on the traditional bread-and-butter issues. Without gathering firsthand data on numerous individual labor negotiations, it remains speculative whether the bread-and-butter orientation is reflective of the principal content of the negotiations or whether it reflects a bias of the source.



Trend data which would furnish a mapping of individual union participation rates compared to social phenomena, such as bureaucratization and professional status, might also be revealing. Professionalization could be measured, for example, using Hall's Professional Inventory (Snizek, 1972) and could be matched with union membership data and other control measures over a selected period of time. Researchers taking this tack need to be careful in their treatment of union data, especially when it comes to counting professionals in the respective professional unions; for example, engineering unions commonly represent technicians. Further, adjustments need to be made for professionals who are truly eligible for union representation. This would presumably exclude those in managerial or supervisory capacities as well as those in self-employment.

What I can offer here on the basis of preliminary case data are two propositions: It is my contention that unionization does not create deprofessionalization. Rather, deprofessionalization occurs first to be followed by efforts on the part of an emerging union to close the floodgates on further deprofessionalization, resulting from social, political, and economic forces as well as by bureaucratic incursions. It is further proposed that a union cannot by itself return the profession to its original professional status prior to deprofessionalization.

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