

# THE MAKING OF A TEACHERS' UNION: THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, USA, 1957-1973

*Wayne J. Urban*

Not long ago, in the pages of this journal, I argued a number of propositions about the current state of historical research in the area of teacher unionism. One of those propositions was that a full explanation of the history of teacher union activity in the U.S.A. quite likely would require a three-pronged analysis involving the local, state, and national arenas.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I hope to elaborate on the interaction and tension among the local, state, and national level of organizational activity as they affected the changing National Education Association [NEA] in the years 1957 to 1973. At the end of the article, I will briefly compare developments in the United States to some recent work on Australian teacher unions and comment on the relevance of events in both of these nations to the Canadian experience.

The National Education Association of the United States of America celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 1957. From its beginnings in 1857 until very early in the twentieth century, the NEA functioned mainly as a platform for discussion of educational theories. Starting around 1910, however, practising teachers and school administrators joined together to remodel the NEA into a more practically oriented association. The partners in this remodelling, however, were not equally powerful. By 1920, school administrators had outmanoeuvred their teacher allies and effectively excluded teachers from any decision-making role in the NEA.<sup>2</sup>

Having guaranteed that teachers would not be autonomous within the association, administrators then moved to incorporate teachers within the lower ranks of the organizational hierarchy by appointing a woman as field secretary

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1. Wayne J. Urban, "New Directions in the Historical Study of Teacher Unionism," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 2 (Spring 1990): 1-15. See also, Urban, "Essay Review: Old and New Problems in Teacher Unionism," *Educational Studies* 20 (Winter 1989): 355-64.
  2. Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), chap. 5.

and charging her, among other duties, with encouraging teacher membership. The NEA leadership thus institutionalized an appeal to the large majority of women in the teaching force to join the association.<sup>3</sup>

The appeal to teachers to become members was often made in other more coercive ways, however. State superintendents and local administrators would pressure teachers in a variety of ways to join the NEA. The state education associations, which were quite powerful in the remodelled NEA, usually were controlled firmly by the states' official educational leadership. Thus, from the 1920s on teachers provided the bulk of the dues-payers to the NEA and educational administrators controlled the organizational agenda and held the leadership positions at both the national and state levels.<sup>4</sup>

The remodelled NEA did not ignore teachers' interests completely, however. A major function of the Research Division, established in 1922, was to publish information on teachers' salaries and other topics relating to working conditions in the schools. Publication of information was as far as the Research Division would go, however. Neither the Research Division nor any other part of the NEA would involve itself in facilitating teachers' occupational actions based on the information the Research Division published. Similarly, the Department of Classroom Teachers, founded in 1912, became the place within the NEA structure where teachers could meet yearly and hear each other's views on the educational problems of the day. This department, however, had no formal role in the NEA's governance, a function firmly controlled by the NEA's top paid staff member, the Secretary, who was in turn allied to the administrative hierarchy within the elected NEA leadership and in the public schools.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1957 and 1973, however, the NEA remodelled itself again, becoming first and foremost a teachers' organization. It embraced any other role in this period only insofar as it did not conflict with the occupational desires of teachers. It is my main task in the rest of this article to account for the forces behind the teachers' rise to power within the NEA and to show the interplay among local, state, and national levels of the association that influenced that rise.

The seeds of the teacher revolution of the 1960s had been sown as early as the immediate post-World War II years when teachers in various cities engaged in strikes to dramatize their very real economic grievances. In several of these strikes, most notably the one in Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1946, the teachers were

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3. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 113-14.
  4. On the NEA in the 1920s, see Erwin Stevenson Selle, *The Organization and Activities of the National Education Association* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 1932).
  5. Edgar B. Wesley, *NEA: The First Hundred Years* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

affiliated directly with the NEA.<sup>6</sup> Though these strikes subsided in the late 1940s, the failure of teachers to participate meaningfully in the economic recovery of the 1950s also resulted in sporadic strikes very early in that decade.<sup>7</sup>

Teacher militancy then subsided for a time in the 1950s, perhaps because of the Korean war and the McCarthy movement. There were signs in 1957, and a few years beforehand, however, that change toward the recognition of teachers' occupational interests was imminent in the NEA. One indication of teacher dissatisfaction was the publication of a series of articles on various aspects of teacher welfare in the NEA magazine from September, 1955 to May, 1956. A second sign was a survey of the NEA management and its practices and procedures conducted by an outside firm in 1957. And a third was a survey of members' views of the association, conducted through an invitation to all delegates to the 1956 and 1957 conventions to discuss the issues that they thought to be most important. The NEA staff was surprised by the demand from delegates that the NEA pursue economic and social improvement for teachers much more aggressively.<sup>8</sup>

These instances of disquiet within the NEA did not lead to immediate organizational change, however. A major reason for the slow pace of change was the amoeba-like character of the NEA. As described in the 1960s, before the organizational alteration was finished: "There are 76 separate units in the NEA: 33 departments, 18 divisions, and 25 committees, commissions, and councils." Harnessing these disparate sub-units to the achievement of any single purpose was an impossible task:

While they are expected to operate within policy determined by the NEA Representative Assembly [the legislative body of the association], many of these units are relatively autonomous in developing their own programs. Other than the limitations of budget allotments and policy decisions by the NEA executive secretary, the restrictions on their freedom of action are minor. Furthermore, several of the committees and all of the councils are joint organizations of the NEA and outside agencies.<sup>9</sup>

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6. Russell C. Oakes, "Public and Professional Reactions to Teachers' Strikes, 1918-1954" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1958), 195-389; and Murphy, *Black-board Unions*, 183.
  7. Oakes, "Teachers' Strikes," 417-45.
  8. *NEA Journal* (September, 1955 to May, 1956); Cresap, McCormick, and Paget, *Management Survey of the NEA* (Washington: NEA, 1957); and Gabriel Steven Pellathy, "The National Education Association: A Political System in Change," (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1971), 72.
  9. T.M. Stinnett, *Turmoil in Teaching* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 213, 214.

In addition to this complexity at the national level, the NEA was also beset by unclear relationships between itself and its state associations and its local and regional groups.<sup>10</sup>

These structural difficulties were exploited by the staff leaders of the NEA, who had little or no desire for change in the association, to frustrate teacher activists. Executive Secretary William Carr had been appointed to his position in August, 1952 after service in NEA staff positions beginning in 1931. He would remain as Executive Secretary until 1967, serving on the NEA staff for 36 years. Carr's senior advisers, organized into what he called his "Cabinet," were the organization's business manager and its six assistant executive secretaries, plus one other member. In 1957, all but one Cabinet member was old enough to reach the mandatory retirement age of 65 within ten years; that one would be 65 in 1970. Carr himself turned 65 in 1967. The clear pattern then was management by an aging group, all of whom were white males with some experience in the schools, usually a few years as a teacher and then a period as a school administrator, prior to a long tenure on the NEA staff.<sup>11</sup>

There were elected bodies to which the staff was presumably responsible, such as the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees. However, the multiple number of these bodies, their relatively large size (the Board of Directors was made up of approximately 100 members), their unclear and often interlocking responsibilities, and their susceptibility to influence from the state associations all meant that they exercised, at best, a nominal control over the staff.

The NEA in 1957, then, like many large organizations, was clearly dominated by its appointed staff leadership, its organizational bureaucracy. Though NEA had elected officers and a legislative body (the Representative Assembly [RA]), the short terms of the officers and the cumbersome character of the relations between the RA and the decision-making segments of the organization—the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, and the Board of Trustees—combined to dilute the power of the members and to strengthen the power of the staff. William Carr and his NEA staff were in no hurry to respond to the desires of classroom teachers. Events in the early 1960s, however, would force a response. Let us turn now to those events.

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10. On these problems, see John H. Starie, "Relationships of Local, State, and National Education Associations in a Time of Change," Position Paper Prepared for the NEA Staff Committee on Joint Chartering of Local Associations (October, 1967), NEA Archives.

11. Wesley, *The First Hundred Years*, 379-80, and Robert W. Bogen, "Organizational Change: Emergence of the Urban Movement within the National Education Association (Ed.D. thesis, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1970), 221-22, 226-27.

Any student of the history of the U.S.A. in the 1960s knows that the nation underwent a considerable amount of turmoil in that decade. The rise of a student movement on college and university campuses, and the connection between this movement and the movement to oppose the Vietnam war, resulted in a turmoil that sometimes reached below the college and university level down into the nation's lower schools. The NEA's conventions reflected this turmoil at times, considering motions against the war in Vietnam as well as motions to give power within the organization to the increasingly visible student movement in the nation's schools.<sup>12</sup> These activities provided one direct and visible link between the rising teacher militancy in the NEA and the political activism that was at large in the nation during the 1960s.

The position that the NEA took on racial issues, though associated with the larger racial turmoil then going on, was not directly linked to the rise of teacher militancy within the association. However, the link between teacher militancy inside and outside of the NEA and its psychic and symbolic forerunner, the civil rights movement, was profound. When black Americans, the most downtrodden minority in the nation, moved to redress their grievances through legal actions and then through direct action such as political demonstrations, the effect on other self-styled downtrodden groups such as teachers was dramatic. Further, in public schooling itself, race relations had become a controversial issue with the passage of the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, a clear indication that the days of segregation in public education were numbered. The NEA's organizational rival, the American Federation of Teachers [AFT], seized the initiative on the issue of race in 1955 by mandating that all of its locals be integrated. The resolution on integration reflected the AFT's historic liberalism on the issue of race as well as the more pragmatic reality that it had few southern locals. The few southern AFT affiliates were forced out of the union in 1956 when they chose not to comply with the racial desegregation resolution.<sup>13</sup>

The NEA was far larger than the AFT and far more diverse geographically, containing substantial numbers of southern state and local affiliates and their members. This meant that the NEA had a lot more to lose from pursuing an integrationist stance than the AFT in terms of member allegiance in the South

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12. In most of the conventions of the 1960s, the NEA's discussions about students concentrated on the composition and programme of its student affiliate organization, the Student National Education Association. In the late 1960s, however, the student anti-war movement and other aspects of student activism provoked spirited debate on the convention floor. A task force was assigned to report on ways that the NEA could respond. See *Journal of Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association* 108 (1970): 211-12, and 109 (1971): 131-36; hereafter cited as *NEA Proceedings*. On the Vietnam War debate, see *NEA Proceedings* 109 (1971): 282-86.

13. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 196-99.

and other rural states. Further, the NEA did not have the union's historical record of enlightenment on racial issues. Thus the NEA temporized after *Brown* as it had done on black-white relations throughout the century. The NEA had separate black organizations in all the southern states by the time of the *Brown* decision, as well as an affiliation arrangement at the national level with the black American Teachers' Association. While the AFT's big city members from outside the South could mandate integration of its locals without losing many members, the NEA's black and white members in southern cities and states were confronting a far different set of circumstances. Southern politicians threatened to close the public schools in reaction to *Brown*. Local or state teacher associations in the South that expressed any interest in integrating their membership were threatened with legal sanctions as well as, possibly, with violent physical reaction from the southern white citizenry and politicians.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the NEA's caution in moving on the racial front at the national level after *Brown* is understandable. But there was more than pragmatic reality behind the NEA's actions. William Carr, though by no means an overt racist, was certainly not the kind of person to move to the front on a public policy issue where he and his organization could be seen as controversial or could be expected to lose influence or membership. Thus, Carr moved to block any attempt, from within or without of the NEA, to move the organization to a position on the racial issue that was in any way in advance of the practical situations that his southern local and state affiliates were confronting. His tendency to temporize rather than to act was illustrated in his speech to the 1967 NEA convention, as that group contemplated action to force desegregation on southern state affiliates: "The association is today able to exert...influence on a nationwide basis only because in the past it has moved with restraint and patience." Going on to confront his critics directly, Carr added: "Some, perhaps many, have felt that Association policy in civil rights should be more radical and rapid. In my view, however, the achievement of the widest possible consensus has been, and is, the price of continued effectiveness."<sup>15</sup>

It was in spite of Carr, then, rather than because of him, that the NEA moved at all in the 1960s to desegregate its southern state and local affiliates. In fact, it was the NEA Executive Committee that was providing the leadership in the merging of the separate racial or "dual" affiliates in the southern states. The Representative Assembly, which had begun to move against dual affiliates in 1964, indicated its endorsement of the NEA's final push to desegregation when it elected Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, a black teacher from North Carolina, as

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14. Michael John Schultz, Jr., *The National Education Association and the Black Teacher: The Integration of a Professional Association* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970).

15. *NEA Proceedings* 105 (1967): 19.

president for 1968.<sup>16</sup> Final victory on desegregation would not be achieved for another few years, and recalcitrant state affiliates such as the Louisiana Education Association and the Mississippi Education Association would have to be ousted from the NEA before it could say that it had finally solved the desegregation issue within its own councils.<sup>17</sup>

This intra-organizational fight on the racial front took place alongside of the rise in teacher militancy that was occurring in the NEA. Teacher militants often supported racial desegregation, but not in a way that meant they saw an immediate connection between the two sets of activities. An indirect connection, in the form of opposition to both integration and teacher militancy from vocal conservative interests in southern state NEA affiliates, contributed substantially to the maintenance of momentum in both movements.

If any single set of occurrences can be said to mark the beginning of change in the NEA, it is the series of teachers' strikes that occurred in New York City early in the 1960s. While these strikes, like most strikes, originated in local conditions and were affected by local circumstances, the failure of the NEA to utilize those conditions and circumstances for its own national organizational advancement and the contrasting organizational success of the American Federation of Teachers [AFT] is the story that is relevant for our purposes here.

The New York strikes accompanied the organization of a powerful AFT local in that city, the United Federation of Teachers [UFT], the recognition of that local as bargaining agent for the city's teachers through its victory in a representation election over an NEA body, and the negotiation of a series of collective bargaining agreements that spoke directly to teachers' economic grievances and their desire for recognition as legitimate actors in the city's educational arena.<sup>18</sup>

AFT victories in New York were repeated in many other big cities, meaning that the teachers' union was becoming a formidable rival to the NEA in terms of numbers of teacher members for the first time since the post-World War I era. Organizationally speaking, one of the main reasons for the NEA defeats was the weakness of its local affiliates in relation to the more conservative state education associations and the national body. Representation elections and collective bargaining agreements in the public schools were local affairs, and the AFT's traditional reliance on strong locals at the expense of state and national bodies, along with its ties to organized labour which had long experience in waging representation campaigns and negotiating collective bargaining agreements,

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16. Schultz, *NEA and the Black Teacher*, 187-89.

17. *NEA Proceedings* 107 (1969): 268-70, and 108 (1970): 346-48, 613-14, 632.

18. On New York and the UFT, see Stephen Cole, *The Unionization of Teachers* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Philip Taft, *United They Teach: The Story of the United Federation of Teachers* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1974); and David Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1984).

meant that the union was able to defeat the association consistently in the big cities.

NEA reaction to these AFT victories took place slowly and clumsily; however, the association did begin to react at both the local and the national levels. The thrust for change from the locals came from teacher activists affiliated with the NEA in cities that were experiencing directly the competition with the AFT. These activists began co-operating with each other in the late 1950s to pursue the interests of city teachers, an agenda that was often ignored in the state association-dominated NEA. As the AFT began to win local representation and bargaining elections, the NEA local activists intensified their efforts to bring the NEA into touch with the occupational realities of urban teachers and schools.<sup>19</sup> These activists gradually infiltrated the elected offices of the NEA and they were eventually successful in organizing their own subgroup within the NEA, the National Council of Urban Educational Affiliates (NCUEA).

At the national staff level of NEA, however, response to the AFT challenge was slow, halting, and ineffective. William Carr initially pursued a strategy in urban locals that was devoted to building NEA membership numbers, not to increasing the strength or service role of the local NEA affiliates. Further, he was personally uncomfortable with collective bargaining for teachers. Under his leadership, the NEA developed "professional negotiations" as an organizational alternative to collective bargaining and organizational sanctions as an alternative to strikes. One NEA staff member was assigned major responsibility for these activities and he devoted most of his time to their pursuit.<sup>20</sup> The policies of "professional negotiations" and "sanctions" were developed to pay homage to the NEA's traditionally stated priority, or perhaps more correctly stated its ideology, of building an educational "profession." This ideology operated rhetorically to tarnish AFT union activities as anti-professional and to prevent teacher affiliation with the official organized labour movement, the AFT and its parent organization, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL-CIO].

The fact that in practice, that is in the settings where contracts were negotiated, the agreements reached by NEA locals differed hardly at all from AFT contracts belies the significance of the difference the NEA leadership posited between its approach and that of the AFT. Also, the formation of the

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19. Bogen, "Urban Movement." Bogen was a staff officer of the Nashville NEA local in the 1960s and his dissertation often functions as a primary account of the activities of the urban caucus of the NEA.
  20. T.M. Stinnett et al., *Professional Negotiations in Public Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1966). Stinnett was the NEA Assistant Executive Secretary assigned to enhancing professional negotiations activities. This edited book, along with another which he wrote, *Turmoil in Teaching*, provides good summaries of NEA activities in representation and bargaining activities in the 1960s.



Coalition of American Public Employees [CAPE] in the early 1970s, a group that involved the NEA with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees [AFSCME] and other public employee unions but operated outside of the AFL-CIO, allowed the NEA to co-operate with other unions while staying out of the official organized labour umbrella. The movement away from sanctions and professional negotiations in the direction of straightforward advocacy of collective bargaining and co-operation with other public employee unions took the better part of a decade for the NEA to accomplish. Much of that accomplishment involved getting around or pushing through the opposition of Executive Secretary Carr. It also should be noted, however, that Carr had plenty of support from numerous NEA members. That support was strongest in several state affiliates, particularly in the southern state affiliates. Carr astutely used that support to combat the plans of the unionist elements in the NEA. In fact, the history of the NEA in the 1960s and early 1970s can be read largely as a war between the union and anti-union elements in the association, or a war between the militant local leaders and the more conservative state groups.

One large victory in that war came in 1966 when Carr received a stinging jolt. The issue here was the advent of several labour organizers into the NEA staff to help promote the NEA's affiliates in their battle with the AFT over collective bargaining rights in local school districts. These labour organizers were recruited from other trade unions and they brought trade union values with them. They soon formed an NEA Staff Organization [NEASO] and Carr was forced by action of the NEA Executive Committee and a vote of the Representative Assembly to recognize the NEASO as the bargaining agent for employees of the NEA headquarters operation. Not only did the Representative Assembly rebuff Carr with its vote on the issue, but it refused even to allow him to comment from the floor on the situation.<sup>21</sup>

This vote was one significant step in the organizational struggle to limit the power of the Executive Secretary, a process that gathered momentum in the mid-1960s. In 1965, one year before the vote on NEASO, delegates to the Representative Assembly passed a resolution recommending an increase in the number and proportion of teacher members on NEA boards and committees. Three years later, they made the recommendation into a requirement by changing one word in it, from "should" to "shall."<sup>22</sup> In that same year, delegates to the Representative Assembly engaged in a serious discussion of the legitimacy of teacher strikes and passed a resolution on the "Withdrawal of Services" that for the first time sanctioned the use of the strike and opposed legislation that would ban teacher strikes.<sup>23</sup> This action was taken, at least in part, in reaction to a

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21. *NEA Proceedings* 104 (1966): 217; also, see Bogen, "Urban Movement," 234-35.

22. *NEA Proceedings* 103 (1965): 180, 417; and *ibid.*, 106 (1968): 529.

23. *Ibid.*, 526-27.

statewide strike that had occurred earlier in 1968 in Florida, led by the NEA's affiliate organization, the Florida Education Association.<sup>24</sup>

The forces behind the rise of the classroom teacher in the NEA would not be confident about the prospects for their movement until Carr was replaced, however. This task was not one that would be accomplished simply. The Representative Assembly achieved one preliminary step in arranging Carr's dismissal in 1966 when it approved placing responsibility for appointment of the Executive Secretary with the Executive Committee, taking it away from the Board of Trustees, a body over which Carr exercised considerable influence.<sup>25</sup>

In that same year, the NEA president, Richard Batchelder, made a militant speech to the convention putting conservative elements in the association—the staff leadership, school administrator groups, and the state association hierarchies which were almost always dominated by administrators—on notice that the NEA was intent on becoming a true teachers' organization. In his own speech to the convention that year, Carr struck a different note, cautioning teachers who were “withdrawing their services” not to engage in that act precipitously. Carr stressed that teachers had not lost their ideals and that they should maintain their ethical commitments and obey the law, surely not what the militant teachers in his audience wanted to hear.<sup>26</sup>

One year after these events, Carr resigned. He had served beyond normal retirement age; his contract had been renewed by the Board of Trustees to extend past the age of 65 even though he himself enforced the retirement age for his own staff.<sup>27</sup> Despite continuing in office, he had come to a position where more often than not he was losing battles within the association to the organizational militants. The Executive Committee was now in control over the process for choosing the Executive Secretary.

Carr's successor was Sam Lambert. In some ways, Lambert resembled his predecessor. He had been a mathematics teacher in West Virginia and then took a position on the NEA staff as an Assistant Executive Secretary to Carr. He was much younger than his boss, however, and he was somewhat more in tune with the organizational militants in the urban NEA locals. Shortly after his selection, he met with the Executive Committee and agreed to a series of organizational changes that made it clear that a new era was dawning within the NEA. The Executive Committee would now control its own agenda, meet more often, and exercise financial control over the association. The NEA President was to take more control over his or her own actions, rather than to have activities scheduled

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24. On the Florida strike, see Wayne J. Urban, “Power and Ideology in a Teacher Walkout: Florida, 1968,” *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector* 3 (Spring 1974): 133-46.

25. *NEA Proceedings* 104 (1966): 476.

26. *Ibid.*, 7-27.

27. Pellathy, “Political System in Change,” 223-24.

by the Executive Secretary. In addition to these structural changes, the Educational Policies Commission (EPC) was abolished. The EPC, which considered educational issues and spoke for the NEA on how they should be resolved, was a symbol of the Carr era. A factor no doubt related to the EPC's abolition was that one of its leading lights had been one of Lambert's opponents in the campaign to succeed Carr.<sup>28</sup>

In describing the organizational changes that had been instituted shortly after his accession to the top staff position in the NEA, Lambert summarized the major force behind their accomplishment in his speech to the Representative Assembly: "This reorganization, fellow teachers, recognizes one very important NEA fact of life: Most of our members are classroom teachers, and they should have a place at the top." He went on to indicate at least one concrete realization of that priority: the staff member responsible for the Association of Classroom Teachers was now an NEA Cabinet officer. Lambert addressed that individual in front of the convention: "Welcome to the executive suite, fellow teacher."<sup>29</sup> In his speech to the Representative Assembly Lambert also went on to indicate the substantial progress that had been made in accomplishing still another organizational change in the NEA, the unification of membership. Unification, or the mandatory payment of dues to local, state, and national associations, had been a priority under Carr but more for the purpose of building a large number of members at the national level. This membership could be used rhetorically to counter the AFT's increases obtained through collective bargaining contracts. Under Lambert the thrust to unify would proceed at a much more rapid pace and be geared to achieving changes in the NEA's programmes to combat the AFT.

Lambert's agreement with the programme of the militant elements in the NEA would prove to be short-lived, however. One reason for this was that he was not as strongly committed to militancy in practice as he was in his pronouncements. Shortly after assuming leadership of the NEA, he was confronted with a statewide walkout of the Florida teachers. The Florida Education Association [FEA], acting in an unprecedented manner for a state association, followed the lead of its militant urban local associations in Miami, Tampa, Jacksonville, and elsewhere, and struck the entire state. Lambert did not advocate the actions taken by the FEA wholeheartedly, and his hesitancy to embrace the Florida teachers enthusiastically can be contrasted with the position of one of his assistants, Cecil Hannan.<sup>30</sup> Hannan, who had come to the NEA staff from a job with the association's affiliate in the more militant state of Washington, was much more

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28. *NEA Proceedings* 106 (1968): 342-46; Pellathy, "Political System in Change," 237-38.

29. *NEA Proceedings* 106 (1968): 18.

30. Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion*, 182. Lambert was never comfortable with the more activist Hannan on his staff. Thus, he fired Hannan shortly after becoming Executive Secretary; see *NEA Proceedings* 107 (1969): 425-26.

in tune than Lambert with the teacher power movement that was animating teachers in Florida and throughout the nation.

Like his predecessor Carr, Lambert reacted in a viscerally negative fashion to the American Federation of Teachers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, AFT leaders such as David Selden and Albert Shanker initiated several attempts to merge the union with the NEA. These attempts were initially successful at the local and state levels in Los Angeles and New York state. Ultimately, however, Lambert's opposition to co-operation between the NEA and any group affiliated with the AFL-CIO would prove to be successful. The NEA members, even some of the militants, balked at being incorporated into the organized labour movement. Though he eventually won this battle, Lambert lost the larger war. He was deposed as NEA Executive Secretary in 1972 as the NEA was revising its constitution and adopting a new form of organizational leadership.<sup>31</sup>

Another significant internal change within the NEA began prior to the constitutional alteration of 1973. This change was the creation of a national Political Action Committee for the NEA and its teachers. Like many other things already discussed herein, the roots of the national political action movement go back to 1957. It was in that year that the Representative Assembly passed a resolution on the "Teacher as a Citizen." The thrust of the resolution was to try to ensure that "every teacher become an active participant in government and an active voter at the polls."<sup>32</sup> This resolution seems non-controversial, though its absence before this year indicates that the NEA was not interested in the image of itself as a creator of teachers who were politically active.

The teacher-citizenship resolution remained among the official NEA resolutions for the next decade or so, though taking a back seat as an issue to the turmoil over collective bargaining and other aspects of the increasing teacher militancy. In 1968, however, in the aftermath of the Florida teacher walkout and as a culmination of diverse attempts both nationally and locally to involve teachers more actively in politics, NEA developed a Teachers in Politics [TIP] programme.<sup>33</sup> This programme was accompanied by a flurry of political activity, mainly weekend workshops on the political process, in forty-five states. As a culmination of these activities, a recommendation was presented to the NEA Board of Directors that a national political advocacy group be created.<sup>34</sup>

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31. On merger, see Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion*, 175-224 and Marshall O. Donley, *Power to the Teacher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 141-73.

32. *NEA Proceedings* 95 (1957): 192.

33. *NEA Reporter* 7 (Oct. 25, 1968): 6.

34. Constance Trishler Shott, "The Origin and Development of the National Education Association Political Action Committee, 1969-1976" (Ed.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1976), 3.

This action represented a new direction for the NEA in two respects. Though the NEA and its affiliates had long practised the art of political lobbying, that lobbying usually took the makeup of the legislative and executive political bodies as a given rather than as an arena for action. A political advocacy group, on the other hand, meant more direct involvement in the entire political process, including the election of candidates. Establishing an advocacy body at the national level threatened the state associations, particularly those with more conservative programmes than the national association, with the possibility that militant teachers in a state might act in response to national directives rather than to the more careful state association guidelines.

These and other fears permeated a majority of the Board of Directors, a large body whose members were responsive to the state associations. The Board of Directors failed to approve a Task Force report recommending the creation of the national political action group. A minority on the Board of Directors, however, had support from the NEA president and a substantial number of delegates to the forthcoming NEA Representative Assembly. The president and minority members of the Board offered a minority resolution advocating the creation of the national political group. This resolution again came up before the Board of Directors. If the directors refused to pass the minority resolution, however, it could be introduced at the Representative Assembly by one of the minority members acting as an individual. This would enable the establishment of the national political action body if its creation were approved by a majority of delegates to the RA. Evidently the cautious members of the majority of the Board of Directors thought that there was a very real chance that the RA would approve the minority resolution. Thus, the Board instead passed a resolution continuing the Task Force which had recommended creating the national advocacy body for another year and mandating a pilot political action programme in one state during that year.<sup>35</sup>

State associations whose members exercised a primary influence on the members of the Board of Directors were not the only ones who feared a national political action group for the NEA. An NEA staff member involved with political action activities noted several other sources for opposition to national political action: "traditional teachers, school administrators, school boards, state legislators, some office holders at every level, and provincial localities (primarily in the Southern states)."<sup>36</sup> Echoing the ideology behind the opposition to collective bargaining within the NEA, opponents of political activity charged that it was unprofessional and, therefore, unbecoming for teachers.

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35. *NEA Proceedings* 108 (1970): 352-55, 373. For support for the contention that the Board took its action to prevent the RA from approving the political action body outright, see the remarks of President George Fischer, as reported in Shott, "Political Action Committee," 52.

36. Shott, "Political Action Committee," 55.

According to the same staff member, those who supported NEA political action included "militant teachers, public employee groups, liberal politicians, and labor unions."<sup>37</sup> The campaign for a national political action committee in the NEA, then, seemed to be the product of the same forces that were altering the association's leadership and would soon change its way of doing business. The NEA's presidents in the early 1970s provided much of the leadership in pushing for the adoption of the national political action committee. To do this, they had to marshal the power of the large number of teachers who wanted to change things and overcome the opposition of conservative elements in the state associations and in the national group who feared change. In addition, some more liberal state associations that had their own political action committees feared the competition for influence in their own states that could come from a national political action body.

The supporters of national political advocacy sought to neutralize state opposition through the holding of regional meetings on the topic throughout the country. In tandem with these meetings, the NEA's elected officers, stalwarts of the supporters of political advocacy, were able to manoeuvre the creation of the national political action body through the cumbersome process of Representative Assembly approval in 1971 and 1972.<sup>38</sup> Even as it was created, however, the National Education Association Political Action Committee [NEAPAC] was structured for restraint. Control over NEAPAC and its activities was lodged in individuals chosen through a process controlled by the states. An important problem facing the NEAPAC was how to raise funds for its activities. Here again, the states put obstacles in the road to accomplishment. By 1973, however, the financial backing for NEAPAC was secured by an RA-approved policy authorizing a solicitation of one dollar from every NEA member and a provision for making sure that the states acted to implement this policy.<sup>39</sup>

The early accomplishments of the NEAPAC were substantial. Created in June, 1972, it quickly geared up for the fall congressional elections. NEAPAC decided not to endorse and support a candidate in the 1972 presidential election (though NEA officers and activists favoured the Democratic candidate for president, George McGovern, they did not believe that he could defeat the incumbent Republican, Richard M. Nixon). In the 1972 congressional campaigns, however, NEAPAC actively supported 184 candidates. Of the 165 candidates endorsed for the House of Representatives, 128 were successful. Of the 19 Senate candidates supported, 13 were elected. In the 1972 election, the

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37. Ibid.

38. *NEA Proceedings* 109 (1971): 308-10, 384; and 110 (1972): 277-80.

39. Shott, "Political Action Committee," 60.

NEAPAC spent a total of \$30,000 and approximately 30,000 NEA members worked in congressional campaigns.<sup>40</sup>

The results in the 1974 congressional elections and in the 1976 presidential and congressional elections were even more impressive. NEA and its NEAPAC received considerable notice for their support of Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign. This support was acknowledged by Carter and was a significant factor in Carter's creation of the Department of Education as a cabinet-level agency, the realization of an NEA objective that had been advocated since 1917.<sup>41</sup>

The adoption of a new NEA constitution in 1973 was the culmination of the numerous changes that had taken place in the association in the 1960s. The new constitution completed a process that began in 1964 when a study of the restructuring of the NEA was authorized.<sup>42</sup> Initially, the Executive Secretary had control over process. He first placed responsibility for reorganization with a staff committee and then turned the matter over to a group of outside consultants. That process resulted in a report that was rejected convincingly because teachers and rank-and-file NEA members had not been involved in the deliberations. The Executive Committee then assumed responsibility for this process, taking it away from the Executive Secretary.<sup>43</sup> Out of that stewardship over the process, the Committee on Organizational Planning and Development emerged. After two years of that committee's activities, the teacher activists in 1969 moved the issue to the floor of the Representative Assembly.<sup>44</sup>

The delegate who introduced the 1969 item to establish a Constitutional Convention provided a rationale that connected this revision to the crises facing the nation's teachers and schools and raised the banner of teacher power as the vehicle to solve the crisis:

Mr. President, today...when our very existence suffers widespread abuse, our performance is fragmented, thin, inadequate. The present, cumbersome machinery of old respected honor in an exhausted NEA cannot catch the pace, the velocity with which...school districts in

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40. "Accomplishments in the 1972 Elections," *Today's Education* 62 (Jan. 1973): 46, and "Get Ready for a Lot More POW in Teacher Power," *American School Board Journal* 161 (Oct. 1974): 32.

41. Shott, "Political Action Committee," 74-84 and David Stephens, "President Carter, the Congress, and NEA: Creating the Department of Education," *Political Science Quarterly* 98 (Winter 1983-84): 641-63.

42. *NEA Proceedings* 102 (1964): 219.

43. *Ibid.*, 103 (1965): 305-6, and 105 (1967): 299-302.

44. The history of the organizational reform was elaborated by Florida activist Pat Tornillo in 1969; see *ibid.*, 107 (1969): 105.

America are wasting away, which is affecting 75 percent of America's students and 300,000 teachers.

...I believe there are teachers on this very floor, thousands across the nation, who have waited for two decades for a select, efficient, effective vehicle to help them negotiate the time to teach, the funds for teaching, the public understanding they need to teach.

This is a first, a first and historic, stunning challenge for teachers to vote "aye" now for their commitment to strike an ongoing role in their responsibility for the education of all kids today. Teacher delegates shall in fact, not in speeches or beautiful program notes, be the determiners of their leadership in all education matters.<sup>45</sup>

The floor debate on the Constitutional Convention (Con-Con) proposal showed clearly that teacher activists were behind it and that state opposition was concentrated among administrators and others who supported the state associations, particularly the more conservative southern state associations. The opponents to Con-Con argued effectively that its cost was not known and, therefore, it could represent a kind of blank cheque. The resolution of the issue in 1969 was a victory for the opposition. The matter was referred to the Board of Directors, a body still responsive to the state associations, which was to make a recommendation to the next Representative Assembly in 1970.<sup>46</sup> In that year, however, the then president, George Fischer, made a militant speech endorsing longer terms for the president, one of the provisions ultimately passed through a constitutional revision in 1973. Also, a candidate for the NEA Executive Committee from the militant National Council of Urban Education Associations made the passage of Con-Con part of his platform.<sup>47</sup> Despite this support, more lengthy debate occurred and the resulting committee to plan the Con-Con was not constituted wholly to represent activist teacher interests.<sup>48</sup>

At the 1971 NEA Representative Assembly, the struggle over the Constitutional Convention continued with teacher activists seeking to alter the emphasis away from the trend of the previous year and toward the direction of the NEA becoming a representative organization of classroom teachers. It would take one more year, however, for the activist teachers to get their wishes. Finally, in 1972, a Con-Con proposal was passed to implement the revision process in a way that responded numerically to teacher militancy by making sure that the Con-Con was composed of a large teacher majority.<sup>49</sup>

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45. *Ibid.*, 100.

46. *Ibid.*, 162-73.

47. *Ibid.*, 108 (1970): 7-17, 47-48.

48. *Ibid.*, 107-24, 133-64.

49. *Ibid.*, 109 (1971): 99-104, 152-53, 419-25, 433-39; and 110 (1972): 106-11,



Another opponent of the Con-Con emerged at the 1972 convention when Executive Secretary Lambert spoke against it in his annual speech to the RA. In his speech, Lambert regretted the 1968 Florida teacher walkout, charging that since the NEA had made a loan of two million dollars to its Florida affiliate that had yet to be repaid, the national group was in serious financial trouble. Lambert linked the expensive militancy in Florida with the attempts at merger with the AFT, another activity he opposed. He in turn related these events to the proposed constitutional revision, arguing that it would emasculate the state teacher organizations and lead the NEA down the road to teacher unionism, an objective to which he was unalterably opposed. The speech by the then president of the NEA was opposed to Lambert's in most particulars. It was also at this meeting that the NEA heard an address by Jerry Wurf, president of the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, a body whom the NEA would shortly join in creating the Coalition of American Public Employees.<sup>50</sup>

Con-Con clearly was a decisive step in the evolution of the NEA into a teachers' union. Though Con-Con was not fully adopted in 1973, changes approved in that year meant a substantial reduction in the number of executive or quasi-executive bodies in the NEA and an increase in presidential power at the expense of the power of the Executive Secretary. The president was now elected to a two-year term and was to be the major spokesperson for the NEA. Shortly before those changes were approved, Lambert resigned as Executive Secretary. His successors would never wield the power within the NEA that he and his predecessors had enjoyed. Teacher militancy had finally won its battle with the state associations and the NEA bureaucracy for control of the organization.

We have seen that the movement for teacher militancy in the NEA originated in the local teacher organizations, particularly the urban organizations. We have also seen that the state associations often proved to be sources for much of the opposition to the rising teacher power movement. This is not to say that all state associations sought to block change; state associations with large numbers of local activists among their members tended to come around to the militant point of view. What must be stressed, however, is that any organization at the state level had a different set of priorities and agenda than one at the local level. A state organization was largely a lobbying group that sought to influence state educational legislation and the administration of that legislation. It had no role in local collective bargaining, except in trying to influence legislation passing and regulating the activity. The state associations largely were isolated from the collective bargaining activity that was taking place at the local school level and

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138-62, 212-15, 229-31, 396-97, 673-76.

50. *Ibid.*, 110 (1972): 14-23, 7-13, 75-77.

that was animating much of the militancy in the NEA at the national convention level.

Thus, in a very real sense, the changes we have described in this article represent a shift in power within the NEA from the state-level associations down to the local and up to the national level. Unification of membership, a long-term theme in these years, meant that once it was passed, individuals could no longer belong only to their state association, or to their local and state associations, and have influence in NEA affairs.<sup>51</sup> Prior to unification, delegates to the NEA convention were not even always NEA members; they could be state association members elected as delegates from their state associations to the national organizational meetings. After unification, this was no longer possible.

A structural alteration of staffing at the national level also indicated that the local and national levels were where the action would be for the NEA in the 1970s. In 1970, the Representative Assembly engaged in a lengthy discussion of a proposed staffing programme for the NEA, the United Staff Service Programme, known popularly as the UniServ programme. In describing the Uniserv programme, the NEA president noted that it was “a program of service to local teachers and their local associations—a program to serve teachers at the local level, where decisions vital to teachers are made.” Foremost among the needs of local associations was help in several areas associated with the negotiations process,

[in] the painstaking research that must precede successful performance at the negotiating table to the subtleties of behavior at the table to the public relations programs that must support the negotiating team. School boards and administrators increasingly use public moneys—the taxpayers’ dollars—to hire professional negotiators to work against teachers. UniServ will place a trained and skilled negotiator on the other side of the table, facing down the board’s hired gun and working with expertise for teachers.

Negotiations, however, would not be the only responsibility of a UniServ staff member. In addition, “UniServ representatives will be responsible for administering the whole range of policies and programs established by the local association.”<sup>52</sup>

The president went on to add that UniServ staff would be employees of the local, state, and national associations, but he also made it clear that “the purpose of UniServ is to build strong local associations” and that “the typical UniServ representative will be accountable to the local association, not the state or national

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51. *Ibid.*, 104 (1966): 217-21.

52. *Ibid.*, 108 (1970): 214.

NEA.”<sup>53</sup> This is a clear statement that in 1970, the local association was the number one priority of the NEA.

The NEA spoke with its purse in the UniServ matter, providing that UniServ staff would be paid in part by a grant from the national level. The state level would not be left out entirely in the Uniserv programme, though its role was less important than the other two organizational levels. While UniServ staff were local employees, paid by the local with financial support from the national organization, “the state groups will have primary responsibility for the professional guidance, supervision, and evaluation of UniServ representatives.” Even in this area, however, the most important function, the training function, was not performed at the state level but by the national: “the NEA will be concerned especially with the UniServ man’s [*sic*] training.”<sup>54</sup>

State association interests, including the organization of state associations (the National Council for State Education Associations) and the associations in southern states where collective bargaining was not legal and was unlikely to become legal, balked at the plan for UniServ. The state associations wished to see any national support funding apportioned not to the local associations but to the states on the basis of membership in the state associations. A graphic illustration of the opposition between state association interests and those of urban activist locals came in the discussion of UniServ. While the Tennessee Education Association opposed the UniServ plan to fund locals, the Nashville Tennessee local, the Metropolitan Education Association [MEA], announced its dissent from the other Tennesseans and its support of UniServ. MEA had begun to employ staff to support its teachers and UniServ would aid them in that process.<sup>55</sup>

UniServ, then, served to institutionalize a direct and unmediated relationship between the National Education Association and its active local associations. These two levels were strengthened as a result of all of the structural alterations of the NEA in the 1960s and early 1970s. The activist teachers who animated the activist locals were the major force behind the changes and the major beneficiaries of those changes. Losers in influence were the state associations and the NEA-appointed staff. School administrators had exercised influence both in the state associations and on the NEA staff. The administrators’ own sub-unit within the NEA, the American Association of School Administrators [AASA], reacted to the teacher militancy that was taking over the NEA by first weakening and then severing its ties with its parent association. William Carr, like his predecessors, had developed and maintained close ties to the leading administrators of American education and made the NEA a voice for the established educational leadership groups of the nation. After Carr, however, the

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53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 216-17.

staff's role and orientation changed. With the change in constitution, the staff was made clearly subservient to the elected leadership. That leadership, and the staff that it employed, were there to serve teachers who were then in the process of establishing their own occupational interests. These interests were often, though not always, opposed to the interests of school administrators.

The state associations, like the NEA prior to its alteration in the 1960s, were closely associated with the school administration of their states. Teacher militancy, however, meant that the teachers were developing ways of representing their own interests, rather than following the lead of their state administrative superiors or of their official local school leaders. We have seen that the state associations often acted to block, delay, or water down changes that were then taking place in the NEA. By and large, their efforts were unsuccessful. The teacher-activist NEA created in the 1960s and the early 1970s was much less of a state-influenced organization than it had been at any time since its inception in 1857.

The tripartite (local, state, and national) of the NEA followed the formal political governance structure of education in the U.S.A. Education, constitutionally a state function, was ceded in many respects by the states to the local school districts. The national government was restricted in educational affairs first to record-keeping and then to educational initiatives in limited areas such as vocational education which were justified as contributions to national welfare. More recently, national educational activity increased first in response to mandated racial integration in the 1950s and then to concerns about the poor, or economically disadvantaged, in the 1960s.

Accompanying these last two developments, the NEA remodelled itself at the national level in the late 1950s and 1960s. That remodelling, as I have shown, was a development that was initiated locally and pursued within the national organization over the opposition of state association interests and local and state school administrators. In many respects the remodelled NEA was a rebuke to its state affiliate organizations which had dominated the association from the 1920s. It would be a slight exaggeration, but one that pointed to the most important set of variables involved, to say that the reorganized *National Education Association* was the result of *local* teachers (working through their local associations) who were chafing under the paternalism of local school administrators whose dominance was ensured by state departments of education which also controlled the *state* education associations.

Andrew Spaul's account of the national teachers' association in Australia, a setting related in some ways both to Canada and the U.S.A., provides one vehicle for international comparison to events in the U.S.A. Spaul locates a rise in influence of the Australian national teachers' association in the 1970s in response to increased federal level funding of education in Australia.<sup>56</sup> Australia,

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56. Andrew Spaul, "A History of Federal Teachers Unions in Australia: 1921-1985,"

in contrast to the U.S.A., has no local level of school governance and no real sense in which teachers are employees of local communities. Thus, failure to find the local level as influential in creating a meaningful national teacher group should not be too surprising.

Canadian readers of this analysis are the best judges if it has any validity for describing their own situation. What does strike this non-Canadian is the extent to which teachers in Canada are incorporated into the official provincial [state] educational effort, often through their provincial teacher associations.<sup>57</sup> Study of national teacher associations in Canada, particularly in the 1960s, a decade of upheaval in many parts of the world, should reveal if the forces identified as influential in the U.S.A. resemble in any way those involved in Canada. The identification and associational affiliation of teachers in Canada might well be somewhere in between the situation in Australia and the U.S.A. If this is the case, study of teacher militancy in Canada can cast light on the situation in the other two nations as well as on the Canadian situation.

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57. An example of this phenomenon in Ontario is highlighted in Harry John Smaller, "Teachers' Protective Associations, Professionalization, and the 'State' in Nineteenth Century Ontario" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1988).

