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A history of teacher organization

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Review

A history of teacher organization

Donley, Marshall O., Jr. Power to the Teacher. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. 242 pages. Paper \$3.95.

Power, a dynamic term—very direct, forceful and aggressive—sets the stage for this text on teacher militancy. Donley has provided the reader with an exceptionally well organized and presented work dealing

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merely with the history of teacher organization. The book is comprehensive yet gives a plethora of specific information. It extends the history of teacher activism into the 1970's, and offers insights into reasons teachers organized, how their unions and associations evolved, and where teachers and their groups are directing their efforts.

The author has provided a more than adequate discussion of the Society of Associated Teachers of New York City, the National Teachers Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the United Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. He also identifies contributions made by Harris, McAndrew, Cruikshank, Crabtree, DuShane, Young, Philbrick, Shanker, Cogen, Selden, Koontz, the Taylor Laws and many more. Furthermore, numerous examples of early strikes and rallies (including those in Virginia, Tennessee, New York and Illinois) are discussed and the conflict between the NEA and the AFT is analyzed in detail.

As a history text, the book by Donley is exceptional. Although the author appears at point blank range on his in-

formation, however, his aim at interpretation and prognostication may be nearsighted. Donley, in his preface, stated that he had hoped to maintain an independent, interpretive view of the subject, but concluded that he accepted the blame for any prejudices that appeared in his projections—and so he should, for the text most assuredly is directed toward the reader in support of aggrandizing the political/economic/social status of teachers through unionism, sanctions, strikes and the like. The reading was intended to be one-sided, and, as a two-headed coin, it is.

The author, through his historic, yet at times esoteric, rhetoric examines the ever-expanding role of unions and, in his opinion, their positive influence on the teacher and on the educational system. Unfortunately, the average reader, or even average teacher for that matter, is aware of a more controversial side to the movement which, inimical to the musical *Gypsy*, may not all be coming up roses. A union (UFA, AFT, NEA), like a rose, by any other name remains just a union.

Donley suggests that there are five principal causes of teacher militancy, which include economic injustices, growing professionalism, growth in school size and bureaucracy, changes within teachers' groups and the availability of mechanisms such as negotiations agreements, sanctions and legal counsel to enable teachers to fight for their goals. He concludes, however, that although each of these issues may play a vital role in the organizing of teachers, the primary areas of interest were those affecting the all-too-worn purse strings. It is interesting to note that documentation indicates the refusal of the NEA to discuss the money basis of education in the early 1900's, for it was assumed to be beneath their dignity—ah, how things have changed!

Teacher organizations (national and state), however, have pressed for non-monetary advances in education. Within various states, the acquisition of kindergartens, free textbooks and schools, normal schools, compulsory attendance laws, codes of ethics, certification regulations and much more, have been promoted by the local teacher groups. Organized teachers, like any organized group, have the ability to press for change and may win, with varying degrees of social cost. The NEA found this all too true, with its statewide actions in Utah, Oklahoma and Florida. The author accurately concluded that the "American public was not so fully on the side of its teachers that it would place their needs first" (p. 94). The NEA learned as well that "prestige of the national organization should not be put irreversibly on the line in any single struggle . . . to fight where it had to and in a way required, knowing that if it lost one battle, it would survive to fight again" (pp. 94-95).

In this reviewer's opinion, an analogy for organized labor is one related to the U.S. military—that of winning the war, but losing the peace. The author does not observe the national (or international) economic effects of the labor movement. Perhaps it is a movement of increasing wages, but it may as well be one of higher consumer prices, inflation and increased government spending. Although data are not conclusive on this subject, it is obviously of sufficient magnitude to merit discussion. Although Donley may have implicitly addressed these topics, he appears, at best aposiopetic on the subject—leaving far too much to the reader.

It is also interesting to note the "results of bargaining" as proposed in this text. The act of negotiation (apparently

almost panacean) will lead to fewer strikes by teachers, greater professionalism of educators, higher teacher morale, an expanded role in the school for the teacher and higher salaries for school personnel. As the aforesaid would demonstrate, we may all rest a little easier, things will work out—just as Donley has been independent and interpretive, without bias and totally, almost adamantly, objective.

Donley, much like Darwin, had to search a long time to provide the reader with such a *selection* of examples. What happened to the examples of schools closing due to limited budgets, those of shortened school years, those of increasing animosity toward public education in general, those of defeated bond elections and those of resistance to increased taxation? Where, also, are the examples of conflicts between parents/teacher, teachers/administrators, teachers/school boards and teachers/teachers over organizing negotiating and striking? Are teachers truly more "professional" because they join a union? Is the working environment one of teamwork and brotherhood (perhaps one of internal union)? And, finally, within Donley's "results" where are the children?

Donley's book may perhaps be the exception to the rule—you can tell this book by its cover. It would appear to be pro-organization and in reality, it is. For the reader in quest of a history of the teacher/labor movement, I would most definitely suggest this text. However, the educator who would like to develop his own opinion by gleaning data from the comprehensive reporting of fact may have to look beyond this book. Somewhere beneath the rubble of academically oriented publications, such a text may exist.

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