Professional Workers, Unions and Associations: Affinities and Antipathies

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I. The Changing Nature of Professional Work

Professional jobs were once viewed as secure and desirable. High levels of educational attainment and substantial specialized expertise helped to ensure professional workers' control over job content and their ability to exercise independent judgement. Writing thirty years ago, Peter Drucker described "the *knowledge worker* [as] the man or woman who applies to productive work ideas, concepts, and information." He suggested that future demand for these workers would be "insatiable," and concluded that "we have to learn to give the knowledge worker a job big enough to challenge him, and to permit performance as a 'professional'" [Drucker, 1968].

In the year 2000, even as the ranks of professionals expand (employment growth in professional and technical occupations is projected to outpace all other groups in the years ahead), the characteristics which once distinguished professional workers from other employees are being diluted, especially influence over job content and authority to exercise discretion. Organizational psychologist J. Richard Hackman recalls that, in 1980, professional jobs seemed destined to become "…ever more rich and interesting," whereas his current research involving airline pilots and symphony orchestra musicians suggests "…surprisingly limited latitude for exercising professional judgement" [Hackman, 1998].

Similar trends are evident for workers in a broad range of other professional and technical occupations. In healthcare, physicians complain that third-party insurance providers, managed care companies, and health maintenance organizations constrain their options in treating patients by imposing cost influenced standards of what is "medically necessary." Registered nurses cope with staffing shortages, restructured work which reduces patient contact, and uncaring distant hospital administrations caught up in the corporatization of hospitals.

In higher education, full-time tenure track faculty are being replaced in the classroom by adjuncts (the share of part-timers in post-secondary education jumped more than 20 percent from 1989 to 1999) and graduate teaching assistants [Summers, 2000], while on-line courses threaten faculty control of the educational process [Weiss, 2000]. Engineers are concerned about rapid obsolescence and increased competition (in part from white-collar sweatshops in countries like

India), which combine to undermine job security. Social workers cope with expanded caseloads and the threat of privatization.

Much of what is undermining the quality of professional work affects others as well. Our economy has gone through a dramatic transformation. Global competition has hastened the shift from manufacturing to services. Industrial restructuring has led to downsizing, outsourcing, and the reorganization of production with increased emphasis on decentralization and flexibility. Rapid technological change influences both production methods and job-skill requirements. The net result has been high job insecurity as employers apply just-in-time production techniques to their hiring and employment relations functions. The use of contingent workers continues to expand, fueling rapid growth in temporary help agencies across a broad range of occupations (including professional categories). These trends have been reinforced by an increasingly popular free-market philosophy, which has permeated both major political parties. Deregulation and privatization may have enhanced economic efficiency, but they also have helped to undermine the social contract and the expectation of long-term employment in a single company or government agency.

Alan Blinder, a former member of the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors, argues that in today's economy labor is viewed as "just a commodity:"

> Look what's happening in labor markets now. Unions are on the decline… Slack is being squeezed out as firms strive more single-mindedly to maximize profits. Long-term relationships between firms and their employees are under siege. Jobs are being outsourced both to reduce benefits and to rid firms of the burdens of long-term relationships. Temporary and contingent work… are growing rapidly. [Blinder, 2000].

And most relevant to the subject at hand, Blinder points out that the major change in regard to job tenure is that "white-collar workers are more exposed to the risk of job loss than they used to be."

What remains to be seen is whether the deterioration in working conditions and the relative loss of employment stability will increase the attractiveness of unions in the eyes of professional and technical workers. Although the unionization rate for these workers is a bit higher than that for the entire labor force (18.1 percent compared to 13.9 percent), the data are deceiving because the bulk of the membership is concentrated in education. Without public

school employees, union density is lower for both public-sector and private-sector professional and technical employees than for other workers.

The following sections will explore the unionization of professional and technical workers in more detail. First a synopsis will be offered of the need for unions to balance the traditional labor issues of wages and working conditions with professionals' concern for job content and decision-making authority. Then the views of professional workers towards work and unionization will be examined, with particular attention to the implications for organizing strategies.

II. Unions and Professional Workers

Professional workers' attitudes towards unions are ambivalent. On one hand, professionals take great pride in their own abilities, intelligence, and accomplishments, and tend to seek gratification individually. There is an inclination to look askance at unions as institutions better suited to blue-collar occupations and low-wage service work. On the other hand, professional workers who feel that they are not given the respect that they deserve are self-confident enough to stand up and demand redress. Frequently, especially where there is a collection of professionals in the same workplace, this involves joining together in an association or a union.

The equivocal stance of professional workers towards unions plays itself out in other ways as well. Both during organizing campaigns and in established bargaining units, tensions arise between union objectives related to terms and conditions of employment and professional objectives related to standards, ethics, and client needs. Professional workers struggle with the question of how to reconcile unionism with professionalism.

Unions that represent professional workers confront this dichotomy, both in how they present themselves to potential members and in how they incorporate professional issues into collective bargaining agreements. The question of how union contracts reflect or interfere with professionalism is complex. In some settings, unions may be able to secure language that protects professional discretion. In other settings, such discretion may be recognized without being codified in the contract. In some cases, unions may enhance professionalism by placing restrictions on assignment to "non-professional" duties. In other cases, work rules may restrict

individual members from voluntarily contributing their professional expertise to work outside of their prescribed duties. And in some contracts, provisions that protect members from arbitrary treatment may indirectly undermine professional standards by conferring job security on less competent workers.

The impact of collective bargaining on professionalism was analyzed in a research project conducted by David Rabban in the early 1990s. A series of interviews with experienced labor, management, and neutral practitioners was supplemented by a detailed analysis of over 100 collective bargaining agreements covering professional workers in a dozen occupations. Rabban looked at professional standards, influence on organizational policy and resource allocation, training and professional development, and personnel procedures including peer review. He concludes:

> This examination… confirms that collective bargaining has had a mixed impact on professional values. Contractual support for professional values varies widely both across and within professions, and many provisions straddle an uncertain and debatable border between professional interest and self-interest. Yet,… [the research] suggests, at a minimum, that unionization and professionalism are not inherently incompatible. [Rabban, 1991].

With regard to the image unions present, a look at self-descriptions on the Web pages of selected labor organizations is instructive. Some emphasize traditional union functions. For example, the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) declares:

> We are office, technical, and professional employees working together to make our jobs better… Through your local union, you have the unique opportunity to:
> - Democratically determine negotiation priorities…
> - Follow a predetermined grievance process…
> - Run for union office…
> - Communicate with other office, technical, and professional employees about issues of common concern.

The American Federation of Musicians offers a similar if more militant description, with some attention to professional concerns inserted:

> We are… professional musicians united through our locals so that:
> - We can live and work in dignity.
> - Our work will be fulfilling and compensated fairly.
> - We will have a meaningful role in decisions…
> - We can oppose the forces of exploitation through our union solidarity.

We must engage in direct action that demonstrates our power and determination to:

- Organize unorganized musicians…
- Bargain contracts…
- Build political power…

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) more explicitly strives to balance union and professional concerns:

> The AFT pioneered the organization of professionals… [We have] competence in serving their interests through collective bargaining and our participation in the labor movement… [We pursue] common goals of professional development, empowerment at work, and building more effective institutions… Our union must stand for the well-being of the people our members serve and the institutions in which our members work—in addition to advancing the goals of security and dignity in the workplace.

Unions that started as professional associations tend to place more emphasis on professional issues and downplay union issues, although some like the American Nurses Association (ANA) seek to achieve balance in their statements:

> The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the economic and general welfare of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on healthcare issues… The ANA is a professional association for nurses as well as the strongest labor union for the nursing profession.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) adopts a position more clearly aligned with its professional objectives, and defends its role as bargaining agent in this context:

> The basic purposes of the AAUP are to protect academic freedom, to establish and strengthen institutions of faculty governance, to provide fair procedures for resolving grievances, to promote the economic well-being of faculty and other academic professionals, and to advance the interests of higher education. Collective bargaining is an effective instrument for achieving these objectives.

The effort to bridge the gap between professionalism and unionism has led to some interesting alliances between unions and professional associations. The OPEIU has set up a division for "guilds" that includes a number of professional associations which have affiliated, including organizations of podiatrists, chiropractors, fashion models, and others. The AFT recently affiliated the New York State Psychological Association. In these alliances, the

associations continue to focus on the professional concerns of their members who are often self-employed. The affiliation with a union gives them increased leverage politically, and emphasizes increased commitment to economic and labor market concerns.

In a column explaining the rationale for affiliation between the AFT and the psychologists, AFT President Sandra Feldman directly addresses how professionalism and unionism converge:

> Professionals are just as interested in decent working conditions and decent wages as other workers. They want what unions fight for: health benefits, a dignified retirement, and voice. And they value the contact that a union gives them with other professionals… Union affiliation will help [psychologists] get back their professional autonomy so they are once more free to act according to the standards of their profession… Professionals, who care about the service they provide and whose first concern is the well being of the people they serve…, want to maximize their ability to exercise their professionalism. They can't do it alone. That's where unions come in.

III. Professional Workers Reflect on Organizing

In order to assess the potential for unionization among the growing pool of private-sector professional workers, it is essential to understand how these workers respond to organizing campaigns. A survey of professional and technical workers, conducted under the auspices of Cornell University and co-sponsored by the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees (DPE) and a consortium of national unions, offers relevant evidence [Hurd, 1998]. Responses to the survey reveal a complex pattern of attitudes, and some clues about what strikes a chord with white-collar workers who are contemplating unionization. The idea behind the research was to interview workers who had actually experienced the influences of union and management in the context of a contested organizing campaign. Because the interview responses are grounded in experience, they are more reliable than answers to the hypothetical questions typically posed in opinion surveys.

Eight groups of workers were selected for the project; seven were discrete units ranging in size from several hundred to several thousand, and included registered nurses, office professionals, technical workers in manufacturing, customer service professionals, and librarians. The eighth group combined several smaller units of musicians—some from symphonies, some

from theater and some from the recording industry. There was a balance of close union wins, close union losses, and pullbacks due to insufficient support. The scientifically designed survey drew random samples from each group, and introductory letters were followed with telephone interviews. The response rate was extraordinarily high, with completed interviews for more than 70 percent of those contacted. Over 1,500 professional and technical workers answered 95 questions about their jobs, working conditions, their employers, union organizing, and employee organizations.

Those in the survey display strong commitment to their work, with 73 percent employed in the occupation for ten years or more and 74 percent who anticipate that they will remain in the occupation at least five years into the future. Job satisfaction is very high at 83 percent, and the top reason for the satisfaction is the type of work performed. When asked to identify the work-related issue of highest importance, freedom to exercise professional judgement is the top choice of most groups (staffing is the most important issue for registered nurses); procedures to assure fair treatment and four other choices are far behind. When asked what type of group activities they would join to address work-related concerns, the top choice (at 90 percent) is meeting with management to discuss policies. The most widely accepted reason for supporting a union or other employee organization is to give workers a voice. The picture that emerges of these professional workers in the aftermath of a union organizing campaign is quite consistent across all of the units surveyed—they are committed to their professions, confident in their own judgement, and interested in having direct influence on decisions which affect them.

For unions, the key to an organizing victory is the ability to attract undecided workers. In order to explore the implications of this challenge more carefully, survey participants were divided into three categories depending on their self-reported stance during the organizing campaign. Those who publicly endorsed the union were classified as "pro-union," those who remained neutral were classified as "fence sitters" (even if they secretly supported the union), and those who opposed the union (either secretly or publicly) were classified as "anti-union."

Once categorized in this way, the response patterns are remarkably consistent across the diverse groups of workers surveyed. Table 1 summarizes the results of statistical tests conducted to identify those factors that explain differences between pro-union and fence-sitting workers. These relationships hold for each of eight cases included in the research. Keep in mind that, although the tests indicate significant differences in attitude, these attitudes are not necessarily in

opposition. So, for example from Table 1, fence sitters are significantly more likely than pro-union workers to prefer cooperation with management rather than standing up to management, **but** a majority of pro-union workers also prefer cooperation; the statistical difference is that fence sitters are even more supportive of cooperation than pro-union workers.

Table 1
Factors Which Distinguish Fence Sitters from Pro-union Workers
(Professional and Technical Survey)

	Fence sitters
Job satisfaction	+
Management OK	+
Cooperate with Management	+
Key issues:	
Ability to exercise judgement	+
Fair treatment	–
Collective action:	
Petitions	–
Protests	–
Union instrumentality	–
Unions reduce individual freedom	+

Table 1 tells us that fence sitters are more satisfied with their jobs, less critical of management, and less likely to be troubled about questions of fair treatment. Given these opinions, the more favorable view toward cooperation is understandable. It also appears that fence sitters are more attuned to individual rather than collective issues. They are relatively more concerned about the ability to exercise independent professional judgement, and more likely to worry that unionization will reduce individual freedom.

With an overall perspective that is both less antagonistic toward management and more individualistic, it is not surprising that fence sitters are less likely than pro-union workers to support collective actions such as petitions and protests. In fact, from the 1,500 responses to all 95 questions, it appears that the factor on which fence sitters and pro-union workers are most at odds is their relative willingness to participate in protests. More specifically, the question was framed in the context of what type of group actions the respondent would support in order to

address his/her most important workplace concern. Whereas both groups voice exceptionally high levels of support for meetings with management to seek solutions, a majority of pro-union workers said they would support protests while a majority of fence sitters said they would oppose them.

The consistency and robustness of the statistical results are corroborated by interviews with experienced organizers of white-collar workers, who confirm that these response patterns are typical. The implications for union organizing are diverse. In terms of targeting, the situation is straight-forward. There is likely to be a broader core of pro-union workers where job satisfaction is relatively low, frustration with management is high, and there is clear evidence of unfair treatment. In any case, the larger the group of pro-union workers the better the chances for organizing success, and in certain "hot shop" settings professional workers may be prepared to take on the boss in a fast-moving, militant organizing campaign. It is unlikely, though, that "hot shops" will be the norm, so in most cases the focus will be on winning support from fence sitters. Because of the differences between pro-union and fence-sitting workers, this challenge is particularly complex.

Although the most effective organizing strategies are those carefully tailored to the concerns and inclinations of the workers in the unit, the differences between those being organized and those doing the organizing can sometimes complicate matters. Typically, those workers who are most adamantly pro-union take the lead in the organizing campaign, and they may well want to push their co-workers to activism. However, trying to push fence sitters into becoming militants may serve to alienate many, and is usually unnecessary for winning support for the union.

Two common approaches to organizing are in vogue today, the choice of which may set the tone of the campaign. The most common of these builds the organizing campaign around actions, with confrontational tactics escalating as the campaign progresses. The rationale is that escalation builds commitment among workers and increases their comfort level with the union and with militant activity. This style is particularly attractive to the archtypical contemporary organizer—young, progressive, and committed to building the labor movement. There is evidence that this approach can be effective, especially when organizing disenfranchised low-skilled workers where conditions are oppressive and the challenge is to build enough self-

confidence to stand up to the boss. However, it is not clear that the escalation strategy is as successful among professional and technical workers.

Table 2
Potential Union Supporters and Protests
(Professional and Technical Survey)

	Support Protest	Oppose Protest
Fence sitters leaning yes	13%	21%
Pro-union	41%	25%
Total	54%	46%

Details from the DPE survey help sort out conflicting evidence regarding the viability of confrontational organizing. About half of fence-sitting workers answer yes to the hypothetical question of whether they would vote for a union on the day of the interview. When this subset who are "leaning yes" are combined with the pro-union workers, the resulting pool includes most, if not all, potential union supporters. Table 2 shows how these workers feel about protests; the total of the four cells adds to 100 percent of the potential yes vote.

It is clear from Table 2 that a majority of pro-union workers support protests, and it is likely that, in a typical campaign, this group will dominate the organizing committee. It is also clear that a substantial minority of the fence sitters support protests (not surprisingly, this subset expresses lower job satisfaction and a higher level of frustration with management than other fence sitters). Clearly, it would be tempting for an organizer (particularly one preferring militant action) to support the vocal majority on the organizing committee and adopt an escalation strategy, then to rationalize it because a vocal minority of fence sitters join in to support the protests. However, the danger is that, in the process, the union will alienate the majority of fence sitters and a substantial minority of pro-union workers. Because those uncomfortable with protests account for nearly half of the potential "yes" vote, this could prove to be a very risky strategy.

The second generic approach to organizing has been developed primarily by organizers of white-collar workers in the private sector, although there are clear parallels to public-sector organizing. This style of organizing concentrates on winning support from fence sitters.

Referring back to Table 1, the campaign accepts that most professional and technical workers are satisfied with their jobs, and concentrates on their desire to exercise professional judgement and influence management decisions. By focusing on voice and professional concerns, organizers attempt to build a positive campaign that will help overcome workers' reticence about unionization. Because management inevitably attempts to draw the union into confrontation, it is difficult to maintain a positive tone. However, the idea is to avoid reacting to management's attacks and concentrate on building the union [Cohen and Hurd, 1998].

This style of organizing has won a surprising convert over the past year. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is known for its effective militant approach to organizing low-wage service workers, demonstrated in its high visibility Justice for Janitors initiative. However, after encountering difficulty with applying the escalation model to the healthcare sector, particularly in campaigns to organize registered nurses, the SEIU has reevaluated its strategy. A series of focus groups convinced the union to hire a communications consultant to assist in reorienting its campaign message. In a successful experiment, the SEIU won the right to represent a unit of registered nurses by encouraging organizers to explain that:

1. Forming a union gives nurses a way to work together with their co-workers… to solve problems and improve staffing and quality care.
2. …Forming a union gives nurses a voice in hospital policies and decisions that affect their jobs and their patients.
3. …Joining together in a union allows nurses to protect patient care and professional standards [SEIU, 1999].

Subsequently, the SEIU published "The High Road: A Winning Strategy for Managing Conflict and Communicating Effectively in Hospital Worker Organizing Campaigns." This organizing guide has stirred some negative reactions, particularly from organizers committed to the escalation model [Labor Notes, 1999]. At least some of the criticisms are consistent with the DPE survey, particularly those which emphasize that a communications message alone cannot replace the need for workers to influence the content and character of the organizing. In spite of the criticism, however, the SEIU's change in direction is consistent with the approach that emphasizes voice and professional concerns. It appears that a consensus is emerging that this style of organizing is particularly well suited to professional and technical workers.

IV Professional Associations or Unions?

There is a substantial body of sociological research about professions. That literature confirms a central role for professional associations in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing professional identity [Ritzer and Walczak, 1986]. Professional associations set educational criteria for membership, adopt codes of ethics for practitioners, protect members from less qualified competitors, and engage in political activity to secure licensing and continuing education requirements. Because of their central role in the professionalization of occupations, it follows that professionals will value membership in successful associations.

In order to explore how professional associations compare to unions, the author has selected 16 for study. Each of the 16 offers members some type of direct services related to the labor market in addition to performing typical association functions. Information has been gathered on all of these organizations, and in-depth personal interviews have been conducted with the membership directors of eight of them. In addition, summary data were obtained from the American Society of Association Executives, confirming that the information gathered on these professional associations fits the pattern for comparable individual membership organizations.

The defining characteristic of professional associations is that they are knowledge based. Their primary role is to be an information source for members of the profession, which they accomplish through newsletters and technical publications. They attend to the professional development needs of their members, offering substantive programs and often continuing education credits. Many professional associations also maintain relationships with educational institutions that offer degrees in the field and sponsor student chapters at many of these institutions.

In addition to their role in information and education, these associations actively promote the professions they represent. Almost all adopt a code of ethics and help to set minimum standards for entry into the profession. Some associations participate in certification directly, and all maintain working relationships with agencies established to grant certification or licenses to those in the occupation. In this regard, professional associations monitor relevant legislation at the federal and state levels, and promote regulations that protect their members' right to practice and uphold quality standards.

Professional associations tend to have a democratic governance structure with elected officers who serve in a volunteer capacity without compensation. The administrative work of the organization is often performed by hired staff (typically **not** from the profession), usually under the direction of an executive who reports to the elected officers. In addition to geographic chapters and student chapters, most associations also have interest groupings which may sponsor their own publications and educational programs. Annual national conferences are the norm, offering professional development programs and continuing education courses to encourage attendance.

Membership directors report that information, education, and professional development are the primary reasons for joining. Most associations offer consumer services such as credit cards, home mortgages, financial advice, and travel bookings and discounts. These services, usually provided by vendors, apparently are of secondary interest to most members. Associations whose members are in private practice or healthcare report that malpractice liability insurance is a very popular benefit.

These organizations tend to offer labor-market services that relate to job search: employment listings in association newspapers and on Web sites, salary profiles of members in specific geographic areas and sub-specialties, and career-counseling services are all common. In response to increased turnover and labor market mobility, some engineering associations are also in the process of establishing portable pension plans. However, most professional associations are careful to maintain cordial relations with employer organizations in their field and are reluctant to get involved in the areas of employer/employee interface. A few associations publish employment guidelines or standards of conduct for employers, but there are no enforcement mechanisms.

The dues of professional associations are in the neighborhood of $200 per year for national membership, with a modest additional charge levied by state or local chapters. Associations also charge members for technical publications, continuing education courses, and annual conferences. In the associations where interviews were conducted, membership ranges from 30 percent to 70 percent of estimated current employment in the profession; membership retention rates are on the order of 80 percent to 90 percent annually.

Because membership is voluntary and must be renewed each year, professional associations are particularly attentive to the educational and labor market needs of their

members. They also have developed sophisticated databases to track individuals active in the profession, whether or not they are current members. Most of the recruitment and retention initiatives are conducted as marketing projects involving mass mailings and telephone solicitations. These activities are supplemented by outreach to students (often through faculty who are members of the association) and by some one-on-one recruiting by local chapters.

The major difference between unions and professional associations is that unions focus on relations with the employer, while professional associations cater to individual needs. Professionals are drawn to associations for access to information, professional development, and networking. They are often drawn to unions in response to trouble with the boss.

Table 3
Type of Employee Organization Preferred
(Professional and Technical Survey)

	Percent
Union	36
Professional Association	30
Employee Involvement Committee	12
Non-union Workplace Association	9
None of These	13

The DPE survey introduced in the preceding section helps illuminate the attitudes of professional and technical workers towards unions vis-a-vis associations. A pivotal question asked respondents to select among the following options: union, professional association, non-union workplace association, management-sponsored employee involvement committee, or no organization. Table 3 summarizes the answers to this question. Recall that all of those surveyed had recently been through a union organizing campaign; also, the question was asked in the context of attitudes towards the job and the workplace. Thus, it is unlikely that the responses reflect the relative preferences of all professional and technical workers. However, with approximately one-third of the respondents expressing a preference for a union, and a comparable share expressing preference for a professional association, we can compare the profiles of the two and learn about differences between them.

The responses of these two groups were pooled and subjected to a series of statistical tests. Table 4 summarizes the results of that analysis, listing all variables where the responses of the group that favored a union were significantly different from those of the group that favored professional associations. As would be expected, there is overlap between fence sitters and those who favor professional associations: 37 percent of fence sitters prefer a professional association, while 56 percent of those preferring a professional association are fence sitters.

Table 4
Professional Association vs. Union
(Professional and Technical Survey)

	Professional Association
Job satisfaction	+
Professional development	+
Group protests	–
Reason to join:	
Job security	–
Source of information	+
Important work related issues:	
Freedom to exercise judgement	+
Procedures for fair treatment	–
Reason not to join:	
Loss of individual freedom	+
Co-workers do not support unions:	
Management is opposed	–
Unions cause tension	+

As a result, the pattern revealed in Table 4 is similar to that in Table 2, which compares fence sitters and pro-union workers.[*] Thus, those who prefer a professional association tend to have significantly higher job satisfaction than those who prefer a union, are more concerned about the ability to exercise professional judgement, and believe that unionization may threaten

[*]Note that there is a difference between "pro-union" workers and those who select a union as the preferred type of employee organization on the survey. "Pro-union" refers to those who publicly supported the union during the organizing campaign; however, one-third of this group told researchers that they actually prefer some other type of employee organization.

individual freedom at work. Those who prefer unions, on the other hand, are relatively more concerned about fair treatment and more willing to participate in protests.

Other differences are of particular interest. Those who prefer professional associations tend to be more interested in professional development and identify "source of information" as a key reason to join an employee organization. This is clearly consistent with the profile of professional associations presented by interviews with their membership directors. In contrast, those who prefer unions are more likely to identify job security as a reason to join an employee organization; given professional associations' aversion to addressing employer-employee issues, unions are in a much better position to tackle such concerns. Differences in responses to a question about why co-workers may not support unions are worthy of special attention. Those respondents who themselves prefer professional associations are more likely to believe that their co-workers are concerned that unions might bring tension to the workplace—professional associations do not confront the boss, unions do; employers do not object to employee involvement with professional associations, but they may be extreme in their opposition to unionization. Those who themselves prefer unions believe that lack of co-worker support is mostly due to management opposition.

Table 5
Reactions to Different Types of Employee Organizations
(percent positive)

Type of Organization	Pro-Union	Fence sitter	Anti-Union
Union	92	40	9
Professional Association	84	84	68

For one of the units surveyed, the question regarding alternative forms of organization was posed differently. Rather than selecting their first choice, respondents were asked for their reactions to each alternative. The responses for union and professional association are summarized in Table 5. While fence sitters are much less likely to react positively to unions than to professional associations, the reverse does not hold for pro-union workers. They are nearly as favorable toward professional associations as they are toward unions. This suggests that if unions could adopt more of the characteristics of professional associations, and/or ally with

professional associations, they may be able to win support from fence sitters (and perhaps even some anti-union workers) without alienating their current supporters.

V. Is Convergence Possible?

In 1985 the AFL-CIO released *The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions.* One of the most widely discussed proposals in the report called for unions to create an associate membership option in order to reach out to the "30 million people who say they support a union, but who cannot establish exclusive recognition immediately [McDonald, 1986, p. 278]." The original idea was to follow the model of independent state employee associations, which started with insurance programs and credit union services then evolved into unions over time. A quarter of a century later, the Union Privilege Benefits Program is a huge success with union members who now use union insignia credit cards and take advantage of a host of other options, from supplemental insurance to legal consultation. However, the attractiveness of these consumer benefits to non-members has been limited and the impact of associate membership programs has been modest. The dream of associate membership as an entry to full representation has not been fulfilled.

In a continuing effort to understand how the Union Privilege program might reach out to non-members more effectively, a series of questions was included on the DPE survey. These questions were posed only to those who said they would prefer some type of employee organization other than a union—i.e., professional association, non-union workplace association, or employee involvement committee. The idea was to assess these professional and technical workers' interest in direct benefits and to gain some insight into whether they might enhance union organizing potential.

Those interviewed were asked three sets of questions. The first concerned legal services; the second concerned consumer benefits; and the third concerned information services. When asked whether they would be interested in specific services in each of these categories (with no mention of any fees), the responses were consistently positive. In regard to legal services, the percent yes ranged from 81 for advice on Family and Medical Leave Act options to 92 for advice if one was disciplined or discharged. In regard to consumer benefits, the percent yes ranged from 52 for a low-interest credit card to 85 for a savings and investment plan. In regard to

information services, the percent yes ranged from 77 for a computer bulletin board to 94 for information on professional development opportunities.

The survey also asked which of these categories of services was most important, and whether their availability would influence the individual's decision to join an employee organization. Table 6 summarizes the responses. Information services are the overwhelming favorite, and the potential to influence respondents' membership appears to be substantial.

Table 6
Preferred Services of Professional and Technical Workers
(percent)

Which services are most important		
a.	Legal Services	19
b.	Consumer Benefits	24
c.	Information Services	57
Influence on interest in joining employee organization		
	More likely to join if services offered	87
	Would be the deciding factor	36

Unfortunately, since the Union Privilege program serves all unions, it is not in a position to offer the type of occupationally specific informational services suggested by the survey (in addition to professional development and a computer bulletin board, the other hypothetical services considered by survey respondents were a workplace newsletter and a job advice hotline). At least for professional workers, consumer and legal benefits seem to be far less important than information.

This evidence confirms that professional associations, with an emphasis on information and continuing education, understand the concerns of the workers they aim to attract. There is a clear lesson here for unions. An information-intensive approach to organizing, which addresses professional issues as well as workplace developments, has the potential to attract support from workers whose first organizational choice might not be a traditional union. Furthermore, there may be some role for an associate membership program as integral to some pre-union organizing effort, but such alternatives must go beyond consumer benefits to address professional issues.

There clearly is potential in unions embracing certain practices of professional associations as part of an effort to lay the foundation for eventual unionization.

It is likely that there is at least as much potential for professional associations to move toward unionization as there is for unions to evolve toward professional associations. A case in point is the American Pharmaceutical Association (APA). The APA is the national professional society for pharmacists. In 1999 the organization dropped its longstanding official opposition to unionization. Preceding the change in policy, the APA contracted with academic consultants to survey its members on their attitudes toward unions.

The survey, conducted by Patrick McHugh of George Washington University and Matthew Bodah of the University of Rhode Island, provides some confirmation of the DPE data. Pharmacists tend to oppose unions if they perceive them to be organizations that are undemocratic or that will restrict individual initiative. Pharmacists tend to support unions if they believe they will enhance wages and benefits and (more central to the argument here) address professional concerns such as training, quality of patient care, and workload. Pharmacists also express preference for unions if they improve communications with management [McHugh and Bodah, 2000].

Table 7
Professional Pharmacists
Tensions Fueling Interest in Unionization

1. Self-employment giving way to organizational employment.
2. Consolidation in the retail pharmacy industry.
3. Higher volume coupled with increased professional emphasis.
4. Insurance complexity and managed care.

(Source: McHugh and Bodah, 2000, p. 2.)

In addition to their survey of pharmacists, McHugh and Bodah explain the "tensions" which led the APA to change its posture towards unionization. These tensions are summarized in Table 7. To interpret, changes in the labor market and in the industry are combining to reduce

the control that pharmacists are able to exercise over their work. This has come at a time when the volume of work is growing, along with pharmacists' concern for professionalism. With the feeling that something has to give, pharmacists have begun to consider whether unionization can offer them the opportunity to re-establish their authority.

The APA's change in posture towards unions is consistent with that of other professional associations in the healthcare field. As has been widely reported, the American Medical Association (AMA) recently endorsed collective bargaining, while the American Nurses Association (ANA) has elevated the status of its union division. Similarly, the American Association of Physicians Assistants is in the process of surveying its members regarding their experiences with and attitudes toward unions.

In all of these cases, external pressures (such as those discussed in the opening section of this paper) are forcing associations to re-evaluate how they operate and the role they play vis-a-vis members and employers. In the engineering professions, increasing concern about job security and obsolescence are forcing a similar reevaluation. Although none has gone so far yet as to endorse unionization, most engineering associations have expanded job placement assistance and related labor market functions. The Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineering has taken the additional step of attempting to open a dialogue with employers about the conditions of work in its recent publication, "IEEE USA Guidelines for Professional Employment: a Framework for Communication."

Although professional associations in healthcare are clearly interested in the option of union representation, the path they will follow is largely uncharted. And engineering associations' increased attention to labor market services is still far removed from an attempt at collective bargaining. Suffice it to say that, even in this period of instability in the market for professional work, the route a professional association might follow towards unionization is still unclear. What is the next step? Although it is not possible to develop cases in detail here, a brief review of selected association experiences with unionization and union experiments with alternatives to collective bargaining may help identify options for promoting convergence.

The affiliation arrangement of the New York State Psychological Association with the AFT offers an intriguing model, as do the agreements between a half dozen small professional associations and the OPEIU. However, it is not yet clear whether these affiliations will bring the added political and economic power hoped for by the associations. Nor is it known whether

these agreements will eventually lead to organizing opportunities for the unions. In the interim, there are questions about the cost-effectiveness of the relationships for the unions involved.

The ANA has, perhaps, the most relevant historical experience of a professional association with substantial private sector membership moving towards unionization. There is a long history of ANA interest in collective bargaining dating back to the 1930s. This position became official in 1946, when the association's national house of delegates adopted a statement which supported efforts by state associations to represent members as bargaining agents [American Nurses Association, 1986]. For many decades, the national ANA continued to defer to the wishes of individual state affiliates, with some embracing unionization wholeheartedly while many did not. It would be a stretch to argue that this decentralized approach was successful. And, while the organization voted to create a union arm at the national level in 1999, it is still too early to determine the fate of this effort. A detailed review of the experiences of the state nurses associations that have essentially evolved into unions could reveal important lessons and should be pursued.

Over the decades while the ANA struggled to find consistency and a coherent national strategy, mainstream unions stepped into the void to offer effective representational services to nurses. Perhaps the most successful nurses' unions numerically have been the SEIU and the various descendents of New York's Local 1199 (now affiliated with either SEIU or the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees/AFSCME), although it is not clear that the industrial union model they prefer satisfies the professional concerns of nurses. The AFT has also established a presence in several states, most notably New Jersey. In fact the AFT-affiliated Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE) is widely respected both for its strength as a union and its visibility as a public voice for nurses in the New Jersey political arena and public debates over issues of healthcare quality. In fact, HPAE may qualify as a best-practices model, deserving attention because of its apparent success at balancing union and professional concerns.

A union that is sometimes mentioned as a descendent of a professional association is the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA). It is true that ALPA's immediate predecessor, the National Air Pilots Association (NAPA), operated as a rudimentary professional association that invited all pilots to join. However, NAPA is best understood as one of several predecessors of ALPA; the others including the Air Mail Pilots of America behaved like unions and even staged brief

strikes. Also NAPA lasted only from 1928 to 1932, collapsing less than a year after ALPA was formed as an AFL-affiliated union [Hopkins, 1971].

There are numerous examples of public employee associations being transformed into unions. However, their character in the pre-union period was far less sophisticated than that of contemporary professional associations. Most collected minimal dues (an average of about $10 annually in 1961) and offered modest services such as supplemental life insurance [Krislov, 1962]. While dozens of these associations evolved into unions, the metamorphosis was forced by the dual motivations of new public-sector bargaining laws (which many of the employee associations originally opposed) and competition from AFL-CIO unions, most notably AFSCME. The choice was to become a union or disappear. After a period of independent union status, most eventually sought and secured affiliation with AFL-CIO unions.

The National Education Association (NEA) represents the most notable case of a public-sector professional association transitioning to unionism. The NEA's involvement in collective bargaining can be traced back to a 1946 strike by the Norwalk Teachers Association. However, it was not until 1962 that the national organization officially endorsed unionization [Butler, 1987]. Once the decision had been made, however, the NEA moved more resolutely than did the ANA and was poised to take advantage of the new state collective bargaining laws that were enacted in the 1960s and 1970s.

Like the state employee associations, the NEA had little choice but to embrace collective bargaining in response to the dual pressures of a changing legal environment and competition from the AFL-CIO-affiliated AFT. Unlike most state employee associations, the NEA has retained its independence from the AFL-CIO, in part because of historical animosity towards the AFT. Popular myth notwithstanding, the NEA is now much more of a union than a professional association. In fact, it is the national AFT, not the NEA, that has taken the lead on issues related to school restructuring, educational quality, and professional standards. At the local level, though, affiliates of both organizations operate very much like typical unions, paying primary attention to bargaining and grievance handling.

In grappling with the challenge of how to perform the functions of a professional association, while simultaneously embracing unionism, it is instructive to examine the practices of NEA and AFT state organizations where there are no public sector bargaining laws. The NEA in Alabama and the AFT in Mississippi and Texas have taken the lead in promoting public

education, while developing novel strategies to advance the economic and job-related concerns of members. Effective political operations combine with strike threats and occasional strikes to establish these education unions as forces to be reckoned with. The experiences of other public sector unions in non-bargaining states are similarly notable, particularly the SEIU in Georgia and Communication Workers of America (CWA) in Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri.

Finally, a small number of experiments with pre-union forms in the private sector may offer important lessons as well, although none of them is clearly successful yet. Working Today offers benefit programs to various community associations and union affiliated groups. It is possible that these programs might prove useful to a professional association contemplating unionization or a union seeking to organize independent professionals.

Potentially more instructive is the CWA experiment with technical workers at Microsoft in Washington State. Although membership is modest, the CWA-affiliated WashTech has attracted substantial attention and influenced Microsoft's policies with respect to contingent professional employees. What is not yet clear is whether WashTech will continue to concentrate its energies on Microsoft or will increase attention to the professional and educational concerns of its prospective members. A partnership negotiated with a Microsoft-certified training center to offer discounts to members is a step in the right direction. The CWA's earlier efforts to organize the NCR Corporation's customer service engineers and its ongoing campaign at IBM are also potentially important as models that can help unions chart future strategies for attracting professional and technical workers.

VI. Deductions, Impressions, and Paradoxes

Sociological treatments of professional workers use educational requirements and prestige to distinguish among different types of occupations. The prototypical professions are medical doctors, lawyers, professors and scientists. Groups with lower educational requirements and prestige are referred to as "marginal professions"—e.g., pharmacists, chiropractors, funeral directors, and engineers. Then come the "female semi-professions," which require comparable educational attainment but offer lower pay and prestige than the male-dominated marginal professions—e.g., librarians, registered nurses, social workers, and schoolteachers. Finally there are "paraprofessionals" and technical workers who serve as assistants to professionals or perform

work at their request. There is a further relevant distinction which cuts across many professional and technical occupations; some are employed in organizations, while others are self-employed or "free professionals" [Ritzer and Walczak, 1986].

In general, higher status professions have stronger associations, while lower status professions have weaker associations. Unions are likely to have more to offer to weaker associations and lower status professionals. Thus, the greatest opportunities for convergence would seem to lie here. The relatively high rates of unionization among teachers, registered nurses, librarians, and social workers bear this out. It is also consistent with the apparent openness to unionization among pharmacists, podiatrists, and chiropractors. Where paraprofessional and technical occupations have no associations, unions may be able to attract members by fulfilling a similar role, specifically by serving as an information source and offering professional development opportunities. Unions may also be able to step into the void where new professional and technical occupations evolve, but this will require diligent attention to new industries and to technological advances.

Given the collective bargaining function that unions are typically organized to perform, they are likely to have more to offer professional and technical workers (at all levels) who are employed by organizations than to self-employed "free professionals." If unions hope to attract free professionals, or even those who are temporary or contingent workers, they will need to experiment with alternative forms of representation (such as political action to solidify the profession's legal status) and/or partnerships with professional associations that can help deliver services that cater to these workers' individual needs. Among professionals employed by organizations, the most attractive organizing opportunities are likely to arise in the public sector where employer opposition is less intense.

Sociologists also describe the process of deprofessionalization. Usually because of external forces, the professional status of an occupation comes under attack. This may occur when the profession's monopoly over knowledge is questioned, or when outside entities exercise increased control over the work of the profession. In either case, the result is that professionals experience a noticeable reduction in authority and autonomy at work [Ritzer and Walczak, 1986]. The developments described in the opening section of this paper are consistent with those associated with deprofessionalization.

With evidence of lower job security and reduced ability to exercise independent professional judgement across the broad range of professional occupations, it is possible that opportunities for the unionization of professionals are rising. The increased frustration and reduced level of job satisfaction associated with deprofessionalization can be expected to enhance professionals' interest in collective action, particularly if the objective is to strengthen their voice and recapture control over their profession. The changing environment should also continue to create opportunities for alliances between unions and professional associations.

The whole question of the convergence of unions and professional associations is fraught with uncertainties. Are the instances of professional associations' interest in unionization and collective bargaining exceptional, or will others follow suit? Are professional associations looking for a free ride and a quick fix, or are they willing to undergo the difficult changes required to transform themselves? Will professional associations sever ties with employer organizations, or will they back off from their new-found interest in confronting the boss? Association members are comfortable with the culture of their organizations and their emphasis on individual professional development and collegiality; will these workers be willing to support a move towards collective action and solidarity?

The questions in regard to unions are also difficult. Can unions incorporate professional associations' characteristics and positive appeal without abandoning or diminishing their historic role vis-a-vis employers? Can unions learn to protect their members' job-based concerns in settings where collective bargaining is not an option? Can unions find a way to reach into professional associations to identify allies who are in a position to exercise leadership as these organizations transform themselves? Should unions use the tools of organizing campaigns to pressure professional associations to accept affiliation?

In spite of these questions, it seems to be the right time for unions to aggressively court professional associations, to pursue alliances, and to experiment with new organizational forms. These initiatives could be part of a comprehensive campaign to expand the unionization of professional workers dramatically. In this context, it is appropriate to conclude with a look at some of the key challenges that face unions as they work to organize professional and technical workers.

Professional workers are more likely to embrace occupational unions than industrial unions. Their priorities relate to job content and control, not fighting the boss per se. Because of

this, union organizing needs to be built around a positive image of enhanced voice, rather than a negative image of waging conflict to whip the boss into shape. This is no easy task. The challenge is to tap professional employees' interest in greater influence, while avoiding tactics that would seem to confirm the negative depiction of unions coming from management. Although management will probably be baiting the union and the organizing committee is likely to be chomping at the bit to take on the fight, the campaign will need to focus on appealing to fence sitters—building their union values while dealing respectfully with their reservations.

Fence sitters' aversion to militance is particularly relevant given the high profile of the recent successful strike by engineers at Boeing and the dispute between the makers of commercials and the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. These are examples of unionized professional and technical workers using their collective power to address changing market forces and to regain professional control and job security. Both examples demonstrate that, once unionized, these workers develop an appreciation for the uses of solidarity and protest.

However, the militance of already unionized workers does not necessarily encourage their non-union counterparts to follow suite. In fact, there is statistical evidence that strike activity by others has a negative influence on union votes in representation elections, in part because the warnings from management of perpetual conflict seem to be confirmed. Because fence sitters and even many pro-union workers in professional units are not attracted to the image of the union as a militant organization, it is wise for organizers to be patient—professional workers become unionists based on experience, not because of pre-existing inclinations. The key to success is to conduct the organizing campaign in a way that reinforces the image of the union as a professional organization that can deal with management on its own level, but on the workers' terms. With the number of professional and technical jobs growing at an accelerating rate, the future of the union movement will be influenced, if not determined, by the success or failure of professional worker organizing.

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