Unionization: Costs and Benefits to the Individual and the Library

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IT IS ONE OF the appealing aspects of cost/benefit analysis to require, at least in theory, that the values and assumptions underlying the analysis be explicitly reported. Admittedly few cost/benefit analyses meet this requirement. Fewer still are the studies which acknowledge that in analyzing complex social and organizational life, important facts are often amalgams of feeling and beliefs rather than the traditionally objective data of hard science.

Considerations of unionization and collective bargaining, particularly in relation to the venerable profession of librarianship (a profession largely exercised in the public arena), invariably call forth a whole range of value-laden assumptions. Union activities are themselves the stuff of controversy, and such activities by professionals who are also public employees seem doubly destined to be the subject of considerable debate. To ensure that no claim is made for an objectivity which does not now exist in this debate, a clear description of the assumptions brought to this study should be made. Such description will form part of the background for the cost/benefit study which we have begun.

Another background element which is important to this study is legislation. Because the legal environment is generally considered to have a major impact on unionization, we will also describe one such environment which is typical, at least, in its complexity.

First, to flesh out a listing of our assumptions about libraries,

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librarians and unions, we should mention our biographies as librarians. Together we represent more than thirty years of library experience, and now work in academic libraries (one in a private university). Academic libraries and librarians have increasingly felt the impact of unionization as collective bargaining has come to the campus. Even before the great growth in campus unionization during the early 1970s, we as academic librarians were aware of a tradition of community between librarians and teaching faculty. Despite the wide variation in relationships between librarians and teaching faculty, this tradition is carried forward when unionization and collective bargaining become major factors on campus. Librarians are very often granted the same terms and conditions of employment as instructional faculty; this model of faculty bargaining provides specific goals for our librarians' endeavors. As active participants in union activities, we have not only joined unions, but have helped to organize them. We have been on strike, assisted in grievance work, negotiated procedural changes in the library, written for union publications about libraries and librarians, and held union office.

Reflecting the assumptions leading to active roles in library unions, one finds a wide range of ideas, most of which are confirmed in the literature on librarians and unionization. It is not embarrassing to recognize a need to achieve a minimum of human dignity on the job. This need, to be satisfied, requires the ability to speak and act with some independence and without fear of reprisal. Bureaucratic life, as several writers indicate, is producing a turn toward unionization among white-collar and professional workers—a situation which might be viewed as analogous to the impact of the assembly line on industrial workers. As libraries and library systems expand, centralize and develop more specialized roles, it seems likely that the integrity of the individual library employee will be increasingly threatened. A union can offer a relatively secure base from which to speak out and to assert one's own interests.

A second assumption might be described as a concern for employee rights. This concept depends to a large extent on comparisons which librarians make with other librarians and with other employees in their work environment; some writers refer to this phenomenon as the effect of a unionized environment. Academic librarians, for example, often compare their status and benefits with those achieved by the instructional faculty of their institution. Needless to say, they usually find themselves lacking. The increasing amount of unionization, whether in school libraries, in large public libraries, or in
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institutions of higher education, does provide ample evidence that employee rights can be enhanced by means of union activity. In conjunction with the comparisons made in evolving a concept of our employee rights, it should be noted that librarians are becoming more aware of the discrimination which they suffer by being members of a female-typed occupation. Not only are librarians often paid less than those with similar or less training and education in jobs which are not female-typed, but many women in libraries experience, as women, discrimination in promotional and other opportunities for professional development.

A further assumption is that professional interests can be advanced through unionization. A view underlying much of this discussion is that there is, more often than not, a conflict between interests as workers and professionals and those of the employer/administrator. In part, this conflict may be the result of a dysfunction or dissonance between the professional and the complex bureaucratic organization. A means of increasing the power of professionals to influence decision-making may have the potential of lessening such conflict and dissonance. While unionization of librarians by no means ensures that opportunities for professional development will be increased, it does hold the possibility of enabling librarians to take part in managing conflict between employee and employer and to work for a more professional set of employment conditions.

To add texture to this description of assumptions, a brief geopolitical note is in order. California's metropolitan areas and its entire system of public education, from elementary through university levels, are exhibiting increasingly conspicuous signs of crisis. This public sector crisis already has its symbol in New York City. California has been the site of some landmark union activities among librarians: the first of the 1960s librarian unions was formed at the University of California, Berkeley in 1965, and the first library union strike against a major library system occurred in Contra Costa County in 1968. Whether California will also provide some landmarks for library unions in this time of crisis in the public sector remains to be seen. Perhaps a sign of future developments can be seen in San Francisco, widely regarded as the most solid "union town" in the state. Two recent strikes by city employees have produced a major shift in public opinion against the city's unions. This change in public perception and the exploitation of this change by politicians may weaken the strength and influence of all the unions in the city significantly; librarians as unionists are certain to be affected by such a change.

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California’s public employees, like others across the country, face an uncertain future. Unlike New York City employees, however, California public employees are not covered by a statewide collective bargaining law. Whether the presence of such legislation will help to protect union gains during this period of crisis is unclear. The complex (if not chaotic) legal scene in California certainly does not seem to offer such possible protection. A description of the California legal environment for unionization and collective bargaining not only will serve to provide some needed detail in an area acknowledged to have an important impact on the degree and extent of unionization, but also will serve to expand the analysis offered in Theodore Guyton's *Unionization: the Viewpoint of Librarians*, which surveys southern California public librarians.

Public library employees in California, including those in public schools, colleges and universities, are covered by the Meyers-Millas-Brown Act. This permissive legislation allows but does not require a public agency to recognize an employee organization or union. Although the law prohibits public agencies from unreasonably withholding recognition of unions, there is no public employee relations board or other mechanism for resolving disputes about the recognition question. Many counties and cities, however, have both recognized unions and negotiated contracts. In San Francisco, for example (and this is a correction of Guyton's information), there is an employee relations ordinance and a Municipal Employees Relations Panel. This panel has served to determine appropriate bargaining units. Professional librarians at the San Francisco Public Library have constituted themselves as a guild and thus are able to negotiate separately from other members of the large Service Employees International Union (SEIU) local to which they belong on such issues as a shorter work week or the amount of time spent on a public desk.

For librarians at the University of California, there is no formalized union recognition procedure. The university system has maintained certain employment practices with its building tradesmen which have resembled contractual arrangements. Such arrangements included, at the Berkeley campus, payment of prevailing wage rates and health benefits to such tradesmen. When the university wished to change these arrangements, which had existed on the Berkeley campus since the turn of the century, a strike occurred in 1972 involving the tradesmen, members of the campus clerical union, and librarians of Local 1795 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). This strike was the longest strike in the history of California public em-
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It ended when a memorandum of agreement was signed, which represented the greatest degree of formal recognition granted unionists at that campus in many years.

In the California State University and College system, not even memoranda of agreement exist. Like the university system, the state system chooses to acknowledge only the "meet-and-confer" requirements of an executive order covering state employee labor-management relations. The broader scope of the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act is not deemed relevant in these situations. Thus, higher education in the state is not yet covered by even permissive collective bargaining legislation.

For California's public schools, however, the situation is different. Public school librarians—and these include librarians at community (two-year) colleges—are considered certificated employees, as are classroom teachers. On July 1, 1976, a new law went into effect extending organization, representation and collective bargaining rights to public school employees. This law provides a framework for fully developed collective bargaining relationships between school districts and employee unions. There is also an Educational Employment Relations Board charged with determining appropriate bargaining units, supervising representation elections, and ruling on disputes about the scope of bargaining and other matters. It seems likely that school librarians will continue to be considered as employees in much the same way as are classroom teachers. Such librarians will probably be included in the teachers' bargaining unit in most jurisdictions.

This legal detail reveals the complexities affecting the unionization of librarians. Costs and benefits to librarians and to libraries may vary considerably depending on what could be termed the degree of unionization. This degree of unionization must be viewed as a compound of the legal environment, the character of the institution (including its historical and political development), and the psychology of individual librarians. These ingredients combine to place librarians and libraries at some particular spot on a unionization continuum. For example, librarians may be in the initial stages of organizing a union, or unionization may have already taken place. According to one definition, unionization implies the existence of conflict between employees and employers, the functioning of the union on behalf of the employees vis-à-vis management, and the willingness to protect and defend fair representation of each and all. Unionization may exist without a fully developed collective bargain-
ing relationship, as our review of the legal environment affecting California librarians has indicated. A true collective bargaining relationship, whether sanctioned by law or in practice, would require recognition by the employer of the union’s right and ability to speak and act on behalf of the employees and to meet, confer, and/or negotiate and execute a written agreement or contract.17

The foregoing remarks adequately indicate our background and assumptions about, as well as our commitment to, unionization and collective bargaining for librarians. Turning attention to documenting with some objectivity the actual costs and benefits of these phenomena, one discovers an almost total lack of information in the relevant literature. What the literature does reveal is an eruption of rather general articles on unionization in libraries in the late 1960s.18 Throughout the early 1970s, there are reports of union activities in various libraries across the nation. The literature of the past several years reveals an increased attention to academic librarians and collective bargaining. Thus, in this development of the literature, one finds initially generalized rationales for the causes of unionization among librarians, followed by descriptions of events in unionized libraries, and currently some fairly refined survey techniques applied to the factors which have proven to be important in unionization.

The literature does not now contain any empirical studies of costs and benefits of library unionization. In fact, cost/benefit analysis seems not to have been applied to the matter of unionization in any sector. This situation in itself calls for some comment. Since cost/benefit analysis is used as a decision-making technique, it would seem extremely beneficial for individuals at all levels of library organization to have a set of rationalized data (costs and benefits) on which to base their decisions to join or not to join, to support or to oppose unions. Yet cost/benefit analysis is invoked not by individuals but rather by organization. Why, then, have not library administrators studied the unionization situation with cost/benefit techniques? There is no ready answer to this question. One might hypothesize that administrators/employers view unionization not as a management option but rather as something thrust upon them and to which they must react. In other words, unionization does not enter into the decision-making process of most administrators at this time. Therefore, discussion must be drawn by inference from the survey data which is available and should be viewed as merely an outline for the type of cost/benefit study which ought to be done in the future.

Perhaps to counteract any bias toward the beneficial aspects of
unionization in libraries and for librarians, the focus will first be on the monetary costs of union membership for individual librarians. Union dues seem to be the most salient feature of unionization to many. A general description of union dues for librarians may be drawn from data gathered at the California State University and Colleges system (AFT), San Francisco Public Library (SEIU), Stanford University Library (SEIU), and the University of California, Berkeley (AFT). Dues payments may be a set figure or a percentage of one's monthly salary; belonging to the same international union certainly does not indicate an identical dues structure. For the library unions sampled, monthly dues range from a $7.50 per month to one-fifth of 1 percent or three-fourths of 1 percent of the librarian's monthly salary. Dues for librarians will, of course, vary with the salary scale when calculated on a percentage basis.

Whatever the amount of monthly dues, there is a pattern of distribution of this amount which is similar for those unions of librarians which are affiliated with international unions. First, a per capita amount is sent to the international union—in this sample, to the AFT or the SEIU. This amount may vary depending on arrangements made with the international union; in this sample it ranged from 10 percent to 30 percent of the total. Another per capita amount is usually dedicated to a statewide or other regional union body which is part of the international union structure. The AFT librarians in this sample pay part of their dues to the California Federation of Teachers, while the SEIU librarians make per capita payments to a San Francisco Bay Area regional council. These per capita payments vary with the relationships between affiliated local unions and between local unions and statewide or regional bodies. In general, these latter payments represent a smaller percentage of the individual dues payment than does the per capita allotment to the international union; in our sample, such payments ranged from approximately 5 percent to nearly 25 percent of the total.

In those states with a federation of AFL-CIO unions, there is also a per capita payment made to that organization. On the county level, there are usually labor councils which bring together the area's AFL-CIO unions. These councils coordinate labor actions in the county and grant or withhold strike sanction. Costs for belonging to such councils in our samples are about 2 percent of the total dues payment.

Regardless of the foregoing patterns, the local union—the base for all the other levels of organization—retains a percentage of its
members' dues for its own use. This percentage varies, of course, in accordance with the structural and financial arrangements previously described. In the California State University and Colleges' AFT union, 15 percent of the dues payments are retained by the campus local.

The expenditure of funds by the local (or by a statewide council of small locals, such as in the University of California or the California State University and Colleges systems) follows a fairly typical pattern. There are full-time and/or part-time staff salaries (e.g., an executive secretary, clerical assistants, paid union organizers); office expenses, such as rent, equipment and postage; and expenses involved in the flow of information, for publications, educational conferences, and committee meetings. Legal expenses invariably consume a portion of dues payments.

Whether the pattern of union expenditures provides benefits to the membership is a judgment to be made by that membership. Such judgment should be based on the effectiveness of the local and its staff, the influence of the state federation of labor in the political arena, the responsiveness of the international union to national, state and local problems, and other factors along the continuum from the individual member level to the international union and beyond. While a cost/benefit analysis of union membership in general would be an intriguing study, it is not appropriate to undertake within the confines of this article. The description provided is only to clarify the cost/benefit factors which affect librarians in their increasingly unionized work environment.

The benefits of unionization to librarians will vary greatly within particular unions, within a bargaining unit and/or within a particular legal context. We must admit that higher salaries cannot necessarily be reported as a direct benefit of unionization. While most recent studies indicate that there may be some correlation between higher salaries and unionization of librarians, there are many factors which need to be considered before such a correlation can be said to exist at a significant level. Perhaps further collective bargaining experience in libraries will reveal such a significant correlation.

Meanwhile, there have been financial rewards reaped as the result of union activities. At least one such example would appear to be incontrovertible. The U.C., Berkeley strike of 1972 resulted in all librarians being cited in the memorandum of agreement which ended the strike. The memorandum recognized the inequities which existed in regard to the wages of librarians; it granted librarians an inequity

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salary increase beyond the usual annual adjustment for other employees. Other examples of salary gains directly related to librarians' union activities are discussed by Guyton. This sample of library unions also indicates that librarians in a unionized context tend to experience an improvement in what has been a traditionally discriminatory salary situation. At Stanford University, for example, United Stanford Employees (SEIU) represents a unit of technical and service employees in which librarians are not included. Nonetheless, some librarians believe that the unionized context encouraged the campus administration to grant librarians a 16 percent salary increase in 1975 even though there were severe budget cuts on campus.21

Librarians also benefit, as do any unionists, from group insurance or other plans. SEIU, for example, provides a $500 death gratuity for its members. All such financial benefits or potential benefits need to be evaluated by the individual librarian in the context of his/her own work situation. This evaluation process will, of necessity, involve comparisons with some reference groups, perhaps other city or county employees, other members of the professional community, or significant others such as the City University of New York. While the citation of C.U.N.Y. faculty salaries as among the highest in the nation is a practice likely to decline as a result of the recent temporary closing of the university, the notion that unionization can bring salary and fringe benefits is one that will continue to be tested by potential union members, including librarians.

In a complete cost/benefit study, an effort should be made to report all quantifiable items in a similar manner; dollars are often chosen as an appropriate neutral vehicle for such reporting. The study of unionization in libraries has not evolved to the point where such reporting is possible. Costs and benefits will therefore be cited here in a descriptive manner to provide a rudimentary outline of those future studies which need to be done.

Beyond the monetary aspects of union membership, each individual librarian should consider the social and psychological costs and benefits of unionization. If unionization can be said to be a response to conflict, it can also be said to be a source of conflict to some within the bureaucracy. Unionization can become a disruptive social process by introducing another power structure into what may have been a unilateral decision-making hierarchy. Unionization may upset a variety of informal working relationships by requiring the formalization of procedures; it may be perceived as intruding upon the prerogatives of professionalism. In these and other ways, unionization may
markedly decrease the job satisfaction of individual librarians. Guyton's reporting of his questionnaire items on job satisfaction among southern California public librarians does, in fact, imply that librarians with more favorable attitudes toward their jobs and their administrations may indeed see unionization as disruptive and diminishing of their job satisfaction.22

Conversely, librarians who perceive the library administrative machinery unfavorably and who may wish, for example, to gain independence from arbitrary decision-making might well view unionization as a means of advancing their professional job interests. Certainly in our own grievance work, we have often found ourselves not merely safeguarding due process for our fellow employees, but also helping to retain or advance some of the most able among us. The perennial controversy over unionization and professionalism does not find substantial verification in our experience as librarians and unionists.

If self-images can be altered by unionization, librarians might see themselves becoming more or less professional or independent, and thus their relationships with others may be changed. Unionization may come between or may bring together the librarian and his/her fellow workers, whether these be library assistants, other city employees or other members of the campus community. At Stanford University, for example, librarians have worked with the Technical and Maintenance Unit of the union to produce a union newspaper.23 At U.C., Berkeley, also, librarians and library assistants joined together during the 1972 strike to produce the Library Union Caucus newsletter.24 Unionists in the same library may also, of course, find themselves in opposition to each other on such matters as the apportionment of salary increases or in matters of discipline and grievance. Librarians who join unions may even find their social horizons expanded. Should librarians become active in their unions, they might find a major avocation in the area of labor relations.

If there are social and psychological factors which must be isolated and examined in some future cost/benefit study, there will necessarily be political elements to be studied as well. As was indicated earlier, unionization affects power relationships within the library or library system and beyond, to the surrounding institutional/bureaucratic environment. Experience in library unions reveals that they have an ability to influence library outcomes and to bring about change. For example, there are several cases of gaining safer working conditions in the sample libraries. To attribute this sort of improvement to a shift in power relationships due to unionization may not seem apparent,
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and certainly a close examination of such situations would have to be made before any causal statements were put forth. What can be reported is that such working conditions remained unchanged until the unions obtained results. In a similar vein, the ability to negotiate adequate staffing patterns for branch libraries, as at San Francisco Public Library, can be attributed to a changing political relationship between librarians and employer/administrator. In fact, as libraries in this sample advance along the unionization-collective bargaining continuum, there are marked professional gains which have been made through the efforts of library unionists. Such issues include the amount of time to be spent on book selection or on a public desk, and the number of librarians to attend library conferences or to be granted sabbatical or other leaves. In the California State University and Colleges system, the political action of the librarians' union brought about the establishment of a ten-month year option for all librarians except directors. In this case, political power was exercised by the union through the state legislature and a law was passed which granted librarians such a ten-month year option. Incidentally, a union poll among the system's librarians in 1975 indicated that they considered the most desirable improvement in their terms of employment to be the establishment of an academic year or nine-month work schedule. Union political activity and influence were able to take librarians a step closer to that goal. The power of library unionists in our work experience confirms that unions can affect libraries and librarians at a variety of points from individual grievances to the enactment of state law.

If the economic, social-psychological and political costs and benefits of unionization and collective bargaining should be analyzed for individual librarians, then certainly the consequences of these phenomena for libraries as institutions and for library administration need to be studied. Lametably the literature provides no better data in regard to the effects of unionization on institutions than it does in regard to those on individuals. We have already indicated that management rarely seems to consider unionization as an administrative option. While library administrators certainly cannot control unionization, it would appear that encouragement or discouragement of such activity remain behavioral alternatives for most administrators. The approach to a sketch here of costs and benefits to library administration will be as if such alternatives actually exist.

First, several recent studies conclude that unionization is bound to increase the time and money spent on procedural resolution of
conflict. This finding lends credence to the view that unionization may tend to add its own bureaucratic presence to the institutional setting, especially in regard to the formalization of practice and procedures. Whether such time and money costs to management would adversely affect the goals of the library itself is a matter requiring careful analysis. It is often claimed that the costs of negotiation inflect themselves on the institution (in this case, the library) in the form of a decrease in funds available for various services. To verify such claims would require a study of the costs of maintaining a nonunionized, less formalized employee/employer relationship. Would there be more staff turnover in a unionized or in a nonunionized situation? Would there be more or less responsiveness to community needs? Would there be more or fewer personnel actions initiated by employees or employer? A variety of such factors would have to be evaluated.

We have already noted the lack of clear evidence that unionized libraries produce higher wages and fringe benefits for librarians. Whether higher wages are produced with a union present or are perceived to be the result of union activity are questions to be judged in a particular library setting. The evaluation of the impact of higher wages would also have to be assessed in terms of library service and the administrative decision-making process. There is no inherent contradiction in stating that higher wages for librarians and other library employees may have a beneficial effect on the institution as a whole. Careful and comprehensive analysis is required to ascertain the impact of higher wages or of a number of other factors, such as decreased workloads, on the character of library service.

In evaluating such seemingly objective factors as the economic ones, analysts and administrators might be tempted to overlook the psychological factors in administrative decision-making. Library administrators may find a union presence difficult if they believe themselves to be exercising semi-autonomous control over their employees. Although it is hard to conceive of an administrator in the public sector believing himself to have a large degree of autonomy in almost any regard, it may be true that some administrators react to approaching unionization as if threatened with some loss. The obverse aspect of this reaction would also bear examination. Could an administrator, as part of his/her thinking about unionization, consider the possibility that a union presence might help to make the work situation more organized and thus more predictable for administrative purposes? The countervailing bureaucracy of the union might
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provide library administration with an additional means of controlling the work environment in a more efficient and effective manner.

While some have argued that organizations lose part of their ability to respond to changing circumstances by being bound up in union agreements, others have stated with equal force that a library union can be a vehicle to bring progressive change to a moribund institution. Again, there need not be an inherent contradiction between union and management levels of responsiveness to the surrounding environment. Our experience tends to support the view that library unions very often do bring improvements in service to our various publics.

In the political arena, particularly as the crisis in the public sector worsens, cooperation between employee and employer becomes increasingly vital in preserving the integrity of library services. Unfortunately, such cooperation rarely occurs. Yet if there is not such cooperation, either because of a convergence of interests in the values and services of libraries or because library unionists achieve an equitable, perhaps decisive, share of library decision-making, then the mere preservation—not to speak of the expansion—of the worth of individual librarians and of the library as an institution in the public arena and in higher education will be in doubt.

The variety of forces, not all of them auspicious, currently affecting libraries emphasizes that libraries are complex, structured organizations. Libraries are composed of librarians, administrators, unions, information, technology, many publics and communities. To assume that there are costs and benefits related to the organization itself (i.e., the library) apart from the aspects mentioned above is to fall victim to reification. Libraries are societal resources; they are situated in a rapidly changing social scene. The decisions which librarians make about unionization and collective bargaining will inevitably become part of this mélange of change.

In the midst of such kaleidoscopic social change, cost/benefit analyses of unionization and ultimately of collective bargaining as occupational and organizational phenomena might provide major assistance to bewildered librarians. Such analyses could become not only an integral part of the life choices made by individual librarians, but also a significant ingredient in the community's decision- and policymaking processes. Cost/benefit studies which could serve in these capacities would have to eschew any narrow quantification. Quantification or the costing of items in monetary terms need be only one part of sophisticated analysis. The values and beliefs which the community
and individuals wish to see preserved or confirmed in practice invariably must be included in a rigorous analysis of a complex social issue such as unionization. We have tried to indicate in this study some of the matters which would need to be considered in a cost/benefit analysis of library unionization—from union dues to professional issues, from the legislative climate to the psychology of library administrators, and so on. Obviously, far more work needs to be done; we have done no more than suggest an area for serious research. One thing, however, is certain in these perilous times for our public institutions and for education itself: efforts to bring rationality and (ideally) reason itself into decision-making processes affecting librarians and libraries can have only beneficial results.

References


10. Guyton, op. cit., p. 34.


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14. Ibid., § 3540-49.3.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid., pp. 94-121.
23. Dible, op. cit.
25. See Garbarino, op. cit.; and Kemerer, op. cit.