Professionalism v. Unionism

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Organization is not new to professional groups; professionals have long realized its importance. In fact, the presence of an association is generally accepted as one of the basic characteristics of professionalism.1 Professional organizations have been established to perform one or more of the following functions: to facilitate social fraternization; to promote occupational identification; to raise the profession's status; to further professional objectives by self-regulation and entry restrictions; and/or to improve the members' economic conditions.2 Over the years, these organizations have taken many different forms. Modifying a classification devised by George Strauss,3 three main categories can be identified: (1) professional societies, concerned with the advancement of knowledge and/or professional interests; (2) quasi-unions, associations with a professional base and job-oriented interests; and (3) unions, which concentrate on the economic situation of their members.

Professional employees traditionally have chosen to join professional societies and to negotiate individually. In recent years, however, this arrangement has been challenged in several ways:

1) They [the professional employees] have been unable on occasion to negotiate individually the kind of wages, benefits, and working conditions they desire;
2) their frustrations in improving their economic and professional status have been compounded where they have been employed by a nonprofit organization and government, both of which make budget decisions far removed from labor relations considerations;
3) their professionalism has been challenged in large organizations which are impersonal and whose decisions are inaccessible.4

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As a result, many of these professionals have elected to try a collective, more militant approach. Some have chosen to join unions to obtain improved conditions. Airline pilots, journalists and performing artists, for example, have been highly organized for some time. Other groups such as teachers and nurses have affiliated with quasi-unions.

Unlike these groups, librarians have had a long and fairly consistent history of bargaining individually and emphasizing professional society membership. Although unions have operated in the library field since 1914, librarians remain relatively unorganized. In large part, librarians have shied away from union activity because they question its compatibility with their standards of professionalism. In the literature, this concern has focused on several major areas: the appropriateness of collective bargaining, the professionalism of union membership, the success of unions in organizing professionals, the split which unions can cause among professionals within the same organization, the problem of striking, the ability of unions to understand professional as well as economic needs, and the value of unions compared to quasi-unions. Each of these areas of concern is elaborated upon and examined below.

**IS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NECESSARY?**

In the past, many professional workers have argued that collective bargaining associations—particularly unions—are unnecessary. Using a kind of “rugged individualism” philosophy, they contend that because of their advanced training and relative scarcity in the labor force, they can more effectively secure better employment situations independently than they can collectively. They view collective action as incompatible with professional status, arguing that: “An individual is entirely responsible for his own actions and that success and failure are objective criteria of competency. . . . Only the incompetent or those who lack ambition rely on group action and explicit rules concerning salaries and conditions of employment.”

Within the library field, the same arguments have been made. Keith Cottam has claimed: “A librarian will generally earn what he is willing to work for, and there are few limitations for librarians with sufficient education and with the wisdom of experience and ambition.”

In the last decade, however, changes in the labor market have affected professional workers' individual bargaining power. The number of professional workers in the labor force has steadily increased, while the proportionate demand for these workers has
declined; the library field has not been spared. As the supply of salaried professional workers increases, the professional's ability to secure satisfactory working and professional conditions through traditional independent action decreases. Unable to depend upon scarcity and uniqueness to guarantee favorable bargaining positions, many professionals have become interested in and felt the need for associations which engage in collective bargaining.

In his article on negotiations among academic librarians, Robert Haro comments on this change in the library field:

Librarians are coming to the conclusion that they cannot continue the passive attitude of relying solely upon official bodies to correct . . . conditions, but that they must join together in vigorous effort to affect needed changes. . . . Collective action and professional negotiations appear to be the methods of securing these goals that an increasing number of librarians are beginning to consider and utilize.8

Haro's estimate of librarians' willingness to accept collective action is substantiated by several recently conducted studies of librarians and library school students. Vignone found that there was a general feeling among Pennsylvania librarians that collective bargaining by that group would not be condemned by public sentiment as being unprofessional.9 Guyton reported that 97 percent of surveyed Southern California public librarians agreed there should be "at least one organization which looks out for the job . . . interests of the members of the occupation."10 Academic librarians in the Midwest indicated overwhelming support for the concept of collective bargaining.11 Similarly, library school students at the University of North Carolina and the University of Southern California rejected the notion that "I can do better by negotiating independently than collectively for my salary as a librarian."12 Thus, the concern in 1976 appears not to be whether librarians are interested in collective bargaining, but, as American Library Association (ALA) Executive Director Robert Wedgeworth contends, under the auspices of which organization it should take place.13

IS UNION MEMBERSHIP UNPROFESSIONAL?

Milton J. Ferguson, addressing an ALA conference, warned, "When, if ever, unionism comes into the library, then we will lower our standards, our morale, our self-respect and our appeal to those
Many professionals fear the trend toward trade unionism. The term unionized, applied to their group, inevitably disturbs them. They argue that it is unprofessional to affiliate. Unions use tactics associated with laborer and radical groups and, consequently, reduce the prestige that a profession enjoys. Kleingartner points out: "For many salaried professionals, the status costs associated with union membership could not be repaid by any gains the union could provide."

It is difficult to examine whether it is unprofessional for librarians to unionize since there is no agreement on the field's attainment of professional status; after more than 100 years of continual discussion in the literature, no consensus has been reached. There are those who see librarians as nothing more than glorified clerks. Paul Dunkin decided that librarians are about as professional as grocers. Gwinup agrees that "librarians have no profession," explaining:

The very expression professional librarian, used principally by librarians themselves, is clear evidence of an unfavorable popular conception. If the expression seems to make some sense, it is only because the public generally does not differentiate between a librarian and any other person working in the library. The expression professional physician, professional lawyer, professional nurse, and professional school teacher do not make sense and, in fact, have a strong element of redundancy.

Louis Vagianos argues that librarians should stop seeking the label "professional" and accept "skilled service worker." Goode, analyzing the field from the point of view of a sociologist, concludes that librarianship (along with nursery-school teaching and podiatry) is inherently incapable of attaining full professional status, because clients tell librarians what their needs are, while in a true profession, the needs of the clients are determined by the professional.

Others take a more positive view of the professional status of librarianship. Dale Shaffer, measuring librarianship against a list of criteria for professional status extracted from more than 200 articles on the subject, concludes that librarians are moving toward, but have not yet attained, professionalism. Harold Lancour and Bundy and Wasserman have separately maintained that librarianship is a profession, but only marginally. Melvil Dewey, as early as 1876, stated without hesitation that librarians are "professional"; and Rangan-
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athan, a respected scholar in the field, concluded that librarianship is a profession because it possesses the traditional attributes of professionalism.24

The controversy remains unresolved. If, of course, librarianship is not a profession, there is no need to consider the relationship between library union membership and professionalism. If, however, it is accepted that librarianship is more than an occupation, the professional validity of unionization must be considered. Assuming that librarianship is a profession, one should consider next whether or not unionization is antithetical to professionalism.

The social atmosphere in which professionals find themselves is increasingly tolerant of collective bargaining organizations. Bakke, reflecting on the future of bargaining in the public sector, concluded: "Direct action and coercive mass pressure, once thought to be a tactic used only by laboring people and communists, is becoming an acceptable approach to upper middle-class people who cannot realize their desires by the use of orthodox methods."25 Many different groups in American society are finding that, in the "interest of equity," it is necessary to develop bargaining organizations to function successfully.26 Blacks are bargaining with whites; tenants are bargaining with their landlords; welfare recipients are bargaining with their agencies; students are bargaining with their colleges; even priests are bargaining with the church.27 Bernstein observes that over the long run, unions have become increasingly accepted institutions in American society—in the law, with employers, in the community, etc. Hence, the act of joining a union has gained growing respectability.28

Professionals are recognizing, along with the rest of society, that protective organizations (like unions) are not only acceptable, but necessary. As the Swedish Confederation for Professional Associations pointed out: "It is, after all, quite a natural thing in itself that a social group should be compelled to organize in a society in which all other groups are organized. Otherwise, it risks being discarded and forgotten."29

Within the library field there appears to be growing acceptance of the union as an organizational option for professionals. More than 80 percent of the public librarians surveyed by Guyton disagreed with the statement, "It is impossible for a librarian to belong to a union, and at the same time to maintain the standards of his profession."30 Similarly, the majority of library school students at the University of North Carolina and the University of Southern California rejected
the statements: "It would be unprofessional for me to join a labor organization," and "It would lower the prestige of the field if librarians were to unionize."\[^{31}\]

**CAN UNIONS ORGANIZE PROFESSIONALS?**

Many writers maintain that although union membership per se may not violate professional standards, unions have nonetheless been unsuccessful in organizing professionals. Labeled as blue-collar organizations, unions are argued to be unappealing to professional groups such as librarians. A common attitude is that "unions and collective bargaining are fine for manual workers, but they won't work for professionals."\[^{32}\] Martha Boaz reflected the feelings of some librarians when she said, "This is not to say that labor unions may not still be the answer for the uneducated man who because of his lack of education and status is unable to fend for himself, but librarians hold at least two degrees... they are intelligent enough to conduct their own affairs."\[^{33}\]

It is true that unions traditionally drew their strength from mining, manufacturing, railroad, and construction workers and thus derived their blue-collar image. It is not true, however, that professionals remain unilaterally aloof from unions. The Department of Labor reported in 1973 that of the 21 million members of unions or employee organizations in the United States engaged in collective bargaining, 3 million belonged to professional or technical fields.\[^{34}\] According to Aussieker and Garbarino, that means that 20 percent of all professional and technical workers are now in collective bargaining organizations.\[^{35}\] Journalists, performing artists, teachers, pilots, and engineers have responded favorably to unionization; and social workers, policemen, and other public service personnel have expressed growing interest in union membership.\[^{36}\]

Although there has been considerable union activity among librarians abroad (particularly in Sweden and Great Britain), library unions have not been particularly successful in the United States. Unions began organizing American librarians as early as 1914; by 1919 there were five library unions.\[^{37}\] After two decades (despite the depression) the union picture had not changed; Berelson reported only 700 librarians unionized at 6 work locations in 1939.\[^{38}\] Between the 1930s and 1960s, paralleling a calm within the public sector, there was little union activity in the library field. Since 1965, with the establishment of the first of a new breed of library unions at the University of
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California at Berkeley, union drives have accelerated. Unions are now represented in all types and sizes of libraries.

The extent of this most recent union movement in the library field is difficult to determine. Unlike earlier union activity—comprehensively described by Berelson in 1939 and by Clopine in 1951—there is no comprehensive statistical study of the current situation. Consequently, quantifying the level of library unionization becomes something of an academic numbers game. The literature is replete with divergent and occasionally inconsistent figures on the prevalence of bargaining organizations. Depending on the source, the growth of unionism is described as fast or slow, and its extent as sizable or limited. According to ALA, "unionization of professional librarians has not increased as rapidly as predicted a few years ago." Hopkins sees unions in the library field undergoing a period of "accelerated growth," whereas the Library Journal reports that "unionization in public libraries is inching along." Based on the few surveys reported in the literature, unionization does not seem widespread. For example, the author discovered only 3 unions at the 164 midwestern academic institutions examined in 1970. Guyton was able to locate only twenty-six public libraries where professionals or nonprofessionals were known to be unionized. A 1974 survey of 375 New Jersey libraries found only 17 with collective bargaining agreements. Thus, while precise figures are not available on the number of librarians who are in unions or covered by collective bargaining agreements, it appears that the organizing of librarians does not match union successes in other professional areas.

Over the years librarians' interest in union membership has remained remarkably constant. Of the 550 public, academic and special librarians responding to a readers' poll in 1940, only 32 percent were in favor of joining a union. Bryan's 1952 study of public librarians revealed a similar, although slightly smaller, level of interest: she found that one out of five librarians would join a union. A more recent survey, conducted in 1968 by ALA's Staff Organizations Round Table (SORT) to ascertain the opinions regarding collective bargaining and unionization of the employees of the 150 SORT member libraries, reported that 37 percent of the respondents would react positively to union membership appeals. The author's 1970 survey of 710 academic librarians in the Midwest revealed that 37 percent would probably or definitely join a union. In a later survey of library school students at the University of Southern California, the author found the same support: 38 percent of the students agreed.
with the statement “If there were a union local at the library where I was working, I would be willing to join.” Replicating this student survey at the University of North Carolina’s Library School, McKenzie obtained almost identical results. In the near future, however, librarians are expected to become more interested in unions (or other collective bargaining associations). The same factors which created a favorable climate for collective bargaining among nurses and teachers—employment concentration, economic imbalance, limited job advancement, and job insecurity—are increasingly characteristic of the field of librarianship.

DO UNIONS DESTROY HARMONY OF INTEREST?

An important tenet in professional ideology has been that a “harmony of interest” exists between professional staff and administrators. Because they operate in the same field, it is argued that these two professional groups share the same concern and interest in developing the profession; cooperation, rather than conflict, is expected to characterize their relationship. This view is illustrated by the librarians’ 1938 “Code of Ethics,” which states: “Each librarian should be responsible for carrying out the policies of the governing authorities and its appointed executives with a spirit of loyalty to the library. . . . Loyalty to fellow workers and a spirit of courteous cooperation, whether between individuals or between departments, are essential.”

If harmony and loyalty between managers and professional staff are essential elements in professionalism, then any force which appears disruptive would be viewed as disloyal and therefore unprofessional. Frequently, unions are viewed as instruments which create a “damaging adversary relation with management” by fostering conflict and hostility between staff professionals and administration. As a result, unions have often been considered quite unnecessary and unprofessional. Various sections of the National Society of Professional Engineers’ anti-union statement elaborate on the view that unions disrupt the natural harmony which exists between the professional staff and managers:

Collective bargaining for professional engineers is in conflict with the basic principles of a professional person. The individual responsibility and independent judgement required of a professional engineer are incompatible with the regimentation fundamentally inherent in unionization. . . . Collective bargaining divides the
members of the profession into hostile groups and promotes discord among members of the same profession. . . . Constructive relations between professional engineers and management and the full development of professional engineers can best be accomplished through programs in cooperation with all elements of the engineering profession.57

In response to these arguments, many pro-union writers have countered that conflict is inherent in any work environment and that unions do not promote the problem, but may actually prevent it. According to this view, it is managerial hierarchy rather than union activity which causes the split between professional workers and their administrators. Patricia Knapp contends that conflict between the two groups—whether or not unions are present—is unavoidable: "Whenever professionals work in the context of an organization, there is inevitable tension between the authority inherent in the form structure and procedures (i.e., the 'rationality' of the organization) and the authority of specialized knowledge and training (the expertise) inherent in the professional role."58 Jack Barbash, conceptualizing the essential nature of relationships between staff professionals and administrators, postulates that: (1) manager-employee relations inevitably generate problems, whatever the character of the work and whoever the employer; (2) these problems can be ameliorated, but never eliminated; (3) neither side can be trusted to protect the interest of the other; and (4) consequently, in the interest of equity, the only practical way to resolve the inevitable conflicts which occur between staff and administrators is to develop a mechanism through which either side can say "no" to the other.59 In his book Scientists in Industry, Kornhauser argues that it is unions which can best serve as this mechanism to reduce conflict by providing a way to mesh professional employee goals (e.g., to advance the state of knowledge) with managerial goals (e.g., to produce a profit-making product).60

DOES UNIONIZATION BRING STRIKES?

By definition, professionals offer essential (i.e., unique, scarce, educated) services. Consequently, they often find the concept of striking incompatible with their role in society. Professionals reason that if their skills are essential to society, then it is inappropriate voluntarily to withhold needed services out of self-interest. This sentiment is widely held throughout the library field. The author found that only one-third of the librarians surveyed in 1970 agreed that "sanctioning
strikes to obtain benefits when all other measures fail” is appropriate behavior. Since, as public opinion polls have consistently shown, there is a “widely shared belief that unions help cause unnecessary strikes,” many professionals have shied away from organizing for fear that, as union members, they would be locked into strike situations.

A look at the library field refutes the contention that unionization inevitably leads to work stoppages. Library unions rarely have engaged in strikes. Berelson, in his 1939 study, reported: “None of the unions use the strike as a method of advancing its interests, and most of them repudiate picketing or mass action. They work through negotiation, publicity and education, petitioning, and promotion of legislation.” Clopine, studying library unionization in 1951, also found little evidence for the often-stated fear that organized librarians would strike: “Despite frequent predictions throughout the years that unionization would bring on a wave of strikes, picketing, and demands for union shops, not a single instance of these abuses has appeared. Every union constitution has contained a clause which states explicitly that the union pledges not to strike. The commitments have been strictly observed.” Goldstein, in his 1968 study of collective bargaining, found that no-strike provisions were routinely included in library labor-management agreements. Gardiner reported that some union contracts contain provisions for fines of up to $500 per day to be levied on the union if its members strike. The first strike by librarians in a major American library did not occur until 1968, when Local 1675 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) walked off the job at the Contra Costa County (California) Public Library. There have been only a few other instances of strikes in the field—and at least one of these strikes was conducted by librarians who did not belong to a union or any other type of employee association; the librarians at High John Branch of Prince George’s South Memorial Library (Maryland) struck, in 1970, over dissatisfaction with the lack of services to “large portions of the community.”

The argument is frequently made in the literature that the strike is not essential to collective bargaining. Industrial relations experts have suggested several alternatives to strikes which professional unions could use to influence working conditions:

1. Direct action. Unions can affect decisions on such topics as wages by circulating pertinent information to public officials and to the
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public itself to get results. Disruptive tactics, such as slowdowns, can bring pressures which will influence public employers. Labor unions can bring lawsuits to protect the rights of their members. 

2. *Indirect action.* Independently, or in conjunction with other elements in the community, labor organizations can exert political pressures on public officials to gain their objectives.

3. *Third party action.* A substitute for the strike and for unilateral determination on the part of the public employer could be the settlement of disputed issues through impartial third party intervention. This could take the form of mediation, factfinding (or advisory arbitration) or compulsory arbitration.

Although these alternatives are currently available to employees, it should be pointed out that they are rarely used. Unlike the library field, other areas have relied heavily on striking as a bargaining tactic. In 1919, 20 percent of the work force was on strike at some time during the year. There were nearly 6,000 work stoppages in 1970. Slightly fewer than 2 million workers were involved in strikes which averaged twenty-four calendar days in duration in 1972. Most of the strikes were initiated by unionized workers or over union-recognition issues. Thus, while it is true that the strike is not an essential tool, it has been used both historically and currently in union and bargaining operations.

WILL UNIONS NEGOTIATE FOR PROFESSIONAL ISSUES?

The argument is made that unions focus only on economic goals and show little interest in professional problems. While they can successfully obtain short-run work-related benefits (such as improved wages, working conditions, fringe benefits and job security), it is contended that unions lack the experience and background to deal with longer-run professional issues (such as autonomy, occupational integrity and individual career satisfaction). ALA President Roger McDonough explained in his 1968 inaugural address: “I am not against unions per se. I don’t feel that unions can, or will, exhibit the same concern for the profession that we do.” Expanding on this view, Boaz wrote: “In most unions, there is no place for a librarian as a professional person or for the development of specific goals of any one profession. . . . The individual librarian, in a union, becomes a member of a heterogeneous group and pursues only employee welfare for the whole group.” Library school students, when surveyed
in 1972 and 1974, also expressed reservations about unions' professional sensitivities. While they felt that unions could benefit librarians economically, they did not believe that they could provide professional benefits for individual librarians or the field as a whole.\(^76\)

In assessing this argument, it should be recognized that unions have recently made concerted efforts to appeal to professional employees. Labor unions need professional and other white-collar workers as members. Although union membership is at an all-time high in absolute numbers, unions are experiencing a proportional decline in their representation of the total labor force (from 25.2 percent in 1956 to 21.8 percent in 1972).\(^77\) This decline in union membership has been caused primarily by the shift from a predominantly blue-collar labor force to one dominated by white-collar workers. Labor unions in the United States have traditionally drawn their strength from blue-collar workers; professional and other white-collar workers have consistently resisted union drives. During the past twenty years, there has been little proportional increase in white-collar membership in unions (it stands at approximately 15 percent) despite this segment's growth in the labor force.\(^78\) Unions recognize that to remain viable, growing organizations, they must achieve greater unionization of professional and other white-collar workers. Consequently, these organizations have instituted significant changes and innovations in order to attract this group of workers.

Unions have developed new forms of organizations to accommodate professional members. Some large industrial employee organizations have established separate professional departments. For example, the United Auto Workers has set up its own Technical and Professional Employees Department. On an even larger scale, in 1967 seventeen AFL-CIO unions created a council called Scientific, Professional, and Cultural Employees (SPACE) to reflect professional employees' interests and needs.\(^79\)

A new method of organizing is also being used by the unions. The approach traditionally followed by unions to attract blue-collar members proved to be unsuccessful in organizing white-collar and professional workers. As John Livingston, organizer for the AFL-CIO, explained it, recruiting of professional employees must be done by a "high calibre staff . . . dedicated, smart and able to handle the different kinds of problems that these workers have."\(^80\) As a result, the labor leaders appearing on the scene to organize professional workers are quite different from yesterday's stereotype of the labor boss. The
new officials are articulate, well educated, and professionally oriented.81

New arguments are also being used to explain the union's role. While organizers are still concerned with employee benefits, they also focus on professional issues. Within the library field, for example, unions have not only worked to increase wages and improve working conditions, but have lobbied for favorable library legislation and promoted continuing education.82 Reflecting this interest in professional issues, at least one union local representing librarians has proclaimed itself a "professional union." The Librarians Guild, a local of AFSCME representing professional librarians at various public and academic libraries in California, attempts "to promote the profession of librarianship" as well as to improve salaries and working conditions.83

Kleingartner contends that unions representing professionals cannot and do not restrict their role to bargaining for work-related goals (which he labels "level I" goals). He believes instead that these unions reflect the interests and needs of their professional members by eventually working toward professional goals ("level II" goals): "In the early stages of the relationship the employee organization will typically focus primarily on achievement of level I goals. However, the logic of professionalism will not allow the protective organization to ignore for long the level II goals of its members."84 Ida Klaus, in her description of the bargaining relationship between the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the New York City Board of Education, provides documentation for Kleingartner's theory. She reports that while the major thrust of the UFT over the years was on economic and work issues, the union also made substantial penetration into level II types of professional issues.85

Within the library field, unions have negotiated primarily for short-term economic gains; no substantial attempts have been made to obtain long-term professional objectives. In separate studies, Belli and Kennelly each discovered that public and academic libraries in 1975 generally ignored professional issues.86 This does not necessarily indicate that Kleingartner's thesis is inapplicable to the library field and that unions involving librarians will remain at level I operations. Kleingartner points out that level II goals rarely become issues or objectives until level I goals are satisfied. Since library unions are still in an incipient stage, they may not have had time to move beyond negotiations for employee benefits.
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QUASI-UNIONS RATHER THAN UNIONS?

Although many writers agree that collective action among professional workers will probably increase, they claim that professional affiliation with unions probably will not. They hypothesize instead that professionals will affiliate with quasi-unions. Kleingartner argues that professional associations which have become quasi-unions have inherently more appeal to professional workers than do unions as organizations. Professional associations have had time to build up substantial membership bases and feelings of loyalty. They lack the negative connotations that professionals often associate with union activity. Although unions appealing to professional groups have made serious attempts to indicate their interest and effectiveness in these professional areas, many professional employees still feel that unions are not truly competent to deal with professional interests. In fact, in the several fields where established professional associations have turned themselves into quasi-unions, they have consistently succeeded in thwarting union activity. For example, despite concentrated recruitment activities, the American Federation of Teachers has managed to enroll only one-eighth of the current membership of the National Education Association. Similarly, within the nursing profession, no association other than the American Nurses' Association—which adopted quasi-union status in the 1930s—currently represents employees to any significant extent.

Keith Cottam was one of the first proponents of the appropriateness of quasi-unions in the library field. He argued that "... strong vigorous, professional associations at the ... state and national levels, with backbone to defend the rights of librarians ... may be the most acceptable alternatives for those who would prefer collective action." Recent surveys of librarians and library school students indicate support for the concept of the library field represented by a quasi-union rather than by a traditional union. Guyton found that 88 percent of surveyed California public librarians supported the notion that "the American Library Association should assume a more direct role in improving salaries." The author also found substantial interest among Midwestern academic librarians in ALA's adoption of an aggressive, employee-oriented role (to increase salaries, to defend dismissed employees, to obtain sabbaticals, to increase pension benefits, etc.). Similar support was discovered among library school students at the University of Southern California and at the University of North Carolina: more than two-thirds of the students surveyed...

[464]
agreed that in addition to working to improve the field of librarianship professionally, ALA should engage in collective bargaining to improve the economic conditions of librarians. The students revealed that if they were to join a protective organization, they would choose an employee-oriented ALA rather than a union.92

Although librarians support quasi-union operation in the field, ALA has not demonstrated interest in such a metamorphosis. Established to promote excellent library service to all, the association historically has proved reluctant to acquire employee-oriented characteristics. ALA has never served as a representative of its members in negotiations concerning compensation, benefits, or working conditions; it has paid relatively little attention to immediate job matters, concentrating instead on broad professional objectives, such as establishing standards for professional practice, accrediting library schools, holding annual conferences, and publishing journals. As Frederick Wagman explained when he was ALA president in 1965:

The ALA, quite frankly, is an association whose primary concern is with the aims, the mission, and the work of the profession. It is not organized for, or engaged in, specific undertakings to better the lot of its individual members in the hard, practical way that a labor union is, say for example, the American Federation of Teachers.93

Recently, perhaps in response to increased union activity and interest in the library field, ALA has reconsidered its professional society role. Its Panel on Democratization, created to “examine the present structure of the American Library Association . . . and to make recommendations for changes,”94 questioned whether the association's primary purpose should be library services or service to librarians—or both.95 By 1970, ALA’s Activities Committee on New Directions had decided that both objectives could, indeed, coexist:

With respect to the question of the Association's concern with the personal welfare of librarians, it is the view of the Committee that the argument on this subject, often debated in the past and based on diametrically opposed conceptions of the ALA is simplistic and spurious. ALA should be neither purely an educational organization nor an organization designed exclusively to benefit its members personally. . . . The question is not whether ALA should endeavor to improve the personal situation of its members but how.96
Although the association has been encouraged to move in new directions, practical and philosophical considerations have been cited as problems in adopting quasi-union status. Lawrence Auld has stated:

Before ALA could assume the responsibility of a union, [some] questions . . . must be considered: the legality of collective bargaining for public employees in some states, the representation of librarians who are not ALA members and the diversity of ALA membership. A fourth question could be raised concerning the professionalization of librarians and how this would be affected by union activities on the part of ALA.97

Furthermore, ALA's constitution does not allow for direct involvement in collective bargaining. As the Library Administrative Board of Directors observed in 1970, "The collective bargaining concept and collective bargaining laws generally preclude the membership of both managers and other personnel in the same union or bargaining group . . . constitutional provisions preclude ALA's becoming a bargaining organization within its current membership and dues structure."98 Finally, the adoption of librarian-oriented activities would cost ALA its tax-exempt status as an educational association. For 1974-75, a loss of ALA's tax-exempt status would have eliminated access to approximately $250,000 in endowment funds and more than one million dollars in outside funded projects.99 Thus, as Robert Sheridan cautions, a change in ALA's role will be costly, as well as potentially beneficial, to the membership: "While it is true that Association members can count on few individual personal services or benefits, it must be remembered that the Association is now defined as a non-profit educational association to promote library service and librarianship. . . . Cost to membership versus benefits to members if this were changed would have to be very carefully examined."100

ALA—unlike other professional organizations faced with union activity—has made little move toward the acquisition of quasi-union status. This hesitation to modify its organizational goals may have dramatic ramifications for the field as a whole, for it has been hypothesized that only by the adoption of union-like activities can ALA maintain organizational hegemony in the library field.101

Although library unions have existed for more than sixty years, it is only in the last decade that collective bargaining has emerged as a viable pattern in librarianship. The growth of unionization in the
library field has been hindered by many factors: personality characteristics of librarians, sex composition of the field, dispersion of library locations, small size of working units, etc.

The greatest obstacle to the growth of unionization, however, has probably been librarians' attitudes toward aggressive employee organizations. Over the years, many librarians have believed that professionalism is inherently incompatible with unionism. They argue that collective bargaining for librarians is unnecessary. Furthermore, they maintain that even if such an approach were necessary, it would not be best pursued through unions. Because of their blue-collar history, unions are viewed as inappropriate for professionals. In addition, unions are accused of disrupting the work situation and causing strikes, strife and disharmony. If librarians must organize, it is argued, a union-like professional association (which understands the professional as well as the economic needs of its members) is a more acceptable vehicle than the traditional labor union.

Some of the points raised in this anti-union argument are not easily dismissed. For example, although it has been counter-argued that unions serve as mechanisms which vent natural conflicts between professionals and their managers, it has been contended with equal vigor that unions undermine the harmony of interest inherent in professional work situations. No evidence has been presented which resolves this point conclusively. Similarly, the exact relationship between the presence of unions and the inevitable execution of strikes has not been determined. Although it is true that strikes characterize many union situations, this is not always the case. In other countries, such as Sweden, unionization has not triggered widespread work stoppages; neither have strikes paralleled union activity within the American library field. Consequently, the validity of these two arguments remains open to question.

Most of the other points raised by anti-union opponents are clearly not supported by the findings of investigations recently conducted into union activities and professional needs. "Rugged individualism" has been shown currently to be ineffective as library occupational behavior. The twin components of rather limited job opportunities within the library field and the growing "organized" nature of groups in society have combined to enhance the usefulness of collective action and negotiations in the library field. Increasingly, librarians and library school students are concluding that they can do better collectively than independently.

It has been further documented that unions are no longer solely
blue-collar organizations. Unions have developed new formats and introduced new methods of organizing to appeal to professional groups. As a result of these modifications and in response to aggressive membership drives, numerous professional groups—including doctors, lawyers, and faculty—have joined union locals. Thus, recent changes in labor union activities and membership composition make it difficult to label union affiliation as unprofessional by definition. In addition, recent studies have revealed that the stereotype of union focus on solely “bread-and-butter” benefits does not hold true for professional locals. Once unions representing professional members have successfully negotiated for economic needs, they move on to professional issues. While it is true that union negotiations in the library field generally have not progressed to this second stage of bargaining, it does not follow that unions are unable to support librarians’ professional concerns. Rather, it probably reflects the fact that first-stage, work-related goals have yet to be secured adequately for librarians.

Within the library field, many factors are operating in concert to increase the likelihood that librarians will affiliate with unions. Employment concentration, economic imbalance, limited job advancement, job insecurity, union interest, and societal tolerance all contribute to an increasingly favorable climate for collective bargaining. The real question to ponder, then, is not whether unionization is unprofessional (at this point such considerations seem academic in view of professional receptiveness to collective bargaining), but rather what will be the effect of the ALA’s lack of response to increased union activity? When professional associations in other fields have faced union activity (e.g., the American Nurses’ Association and the National Education Association), they have modified their approach to include union-like activities. The American Library Association, despite encouragement from its Panel on Democratization and its Activities Committee on New Directions, has consistently hesitated to acquire quasi-union status. Legal, philosophical, financial, and organizational considerations are cited as explanations for ALA’s reluctance to adopt this new role. Even if ALA were now to reverse its stand and develop a collective bargaining program, this change would most likely prove to be too late to be effective. Through indecision and hesitation, ALA has probably lost the opportunity to channel collective bargaining activity through its own organization. Thus, unlike nursing and teaching, organizational hegemony may very well shift from the professional association to the labor union in the library field.

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