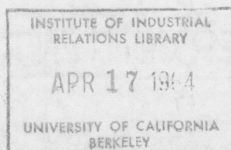


PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF
PROFESSIONAL WORKERS.//

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Professional Associations and the Organization of Professional Workers

The purpose of this study is to examine, in the light of what has been written on the organization of white collar employees, how professional societies reacted to the organizational movement in the white collar section of the labor force, to what extent they took part in this movement, and why. White collar workers can be classified as professionals such as engineers, scientists, and lawyers and in a general category of white collar workers such as clerks and sales workers. This study is concerned with the former.

The labor force in this country consists today of an increasing proportion of white collar workers in relation to blue collar workers, the former being as yet largely unorganized, and by and large, showing a reluctance to be organized. Unions, however, must turn to white collar employees for their future growth. There are several reasons why the unions are directing an increasing amount of attention to this section of the labor force. Technology which tends to routinize many occupations, will play an increasing role in the unionization of the white collar worker. Unions have already organized the great bulk of blue collar workers and must now direct their attention to the increasingly important white collar segment of the labor force. An important segment of the white collar labor force is the professional employee who is increasingly becoming a salaried employee rather than a self-employed person applying a special competence with considerable autonomy.

A great deal of effort is being expended by various bodies in an effort to obtain some sort of control over and to offer some kind of leadership to the professional employees and, indeed, to the white collar sector of the labor force.

The Professional

At the outset it is necessary to define what a professional is, what his goals are, and how they may conflict with management goals. No discussion of an organizational movement involving professionals can be meaningful unless this forms the fundamental background of the discussion.

I found that the literature is not always consistent in its definition of a professional. It is necessary to understand how the word is used and which occupational groups it embraces before one can intelligently understand an article. The word profession can assume a number of different proportions. An increasing number of occupational groups are coming under the heading of professionals including management itself. Other occupational groups are striving to gain professional status and recognition. This creates problems of definition. One must understand how the word is used in order to put the ideas presented in their proper perspective.

The professional, as I will use the term, has at least four years of college and, more commonly, advanced training. He identifies himself with his profession and often follows a well-established code of behavior. This has caused conflicting demands to be thrust upon the professional. The codes he is expected to follow were often established to meet the needs of an independent professional. These codes often create problems when the professional is

a salaried employee for both the employer and the salaried professional. The professional is career orientated and often demands extensive autonomy in exercising his special competence. He seeks recognition from other members in his profession and often finds his goals conflicting with the goals of an organization that employs him, especially goals of recognition and autonomy. Advancement of professionals can be a difficult problem for the professional in a business organization. This, of course, depends largely upon the professionals motivations and professional orientation.

Professional Organizations

Most articles and books dealing with the professional identify two main organizations, that of the professional society and that of the professional union.

Strange as it may appear, an inquiry into the part played by professional societies in the organizational effort is considerably complicated by the lack of an accepted terminology. The very same things are often labeled with different names, and often the confusion does not seem to be wholly casual. It is obvious that the results of this terminologic disagreement go well beyond the limits of a formal or semantic problem. They affect rather deeply the clearness of some basic concepts, and bring about all sorts of misunderstanding, indeed, as will be shown, they tend to obliterate the distinction between professional societies and trade unions.

As was pointed out earlier, professional organizations are commonly thought of as consisting mainly of professional societies and professional unions. This is, however, not sufficient. There is

a large grey area between a "pure" professional society and a "pure" professional union.

Professional societies seek to maintain a high level of competence. They have a problem of combining study and practice among their membership. These societies often set qualifications for membership in the professions by licensing requirements and sometimes by a test of competency. They are interested in disseminating information and in protecting their profession. These societies are generally opposed to unionization of their professional members and to collective bargaining. However, the depression and unemployment during the 1930's directed the efforts of many societies toward ways of alleviating the economic hardships of their members. Professional societies take the position that unionization is inconsistent with professional status and feel that they must engage in limited collective bargaining to combat the unions. Professional societies have also employed measures short of collective bargaining to influence the economic well being of their membership. Thus many professional societies actually perform functions more commonly identified with unions. Often these activities have been ineffective.

The other organization commonly identified in the literature is the professional union. As might be expected, the professional union is concerned with the traditional issues of unions such as wages, security and advancement. However, professional unions have also had to direct a large amount of effort to protecting the status of their professional membership. Professional unions seem to be at least as interested in this latter function as they are in the

more traditional one. This concern with professional status is shared with the professional society.

Professional unions, after a brief period of activity, are not important today. They will probably never gain much importance for the organization of the professional worker.

I do not feel enough attention is directed at the emergence, clarification, and study of a relatively new type of organization which is, in effect, an off-spring of the professional society and the professional union. The opposition to unions by the professional society and the efforts to organize the professional by the unions has resulted in a give and take situation which resulted in an organization which combines the characteristics of both the unions and the society in varying degrees.

This organization or association represents the main area of terminologic vagueness. This is the type of professional organization that needs a close study as it will assume an increasing role in the organization of professionals. It is an association that is neither, strictly speaking, a union or a professional society.

"In an earlier paper, it was suggested that unions of professionals might be viewed as representing an amalgam of elements of the professional society and the traditional trade union."¹

Many of the articles I consulted might lead one to conclude that professional societies do not exist as such, or that they are trade unions in disguise. Much of the recent literature seems to ignore professional societies altogether, or at least persists in considering them as equivalent to trade unions. This is because

1. Bernard Goldstein, "The Perspective of Unionized Professionals,"

professional societies have often evolved into this new breed of professional association. However, the professional society has played an important role in preventing the unionization of the professional workers. One must be careful when speaking of professional societies. Pure professional societies still exist. They are however, not of great importance for the salaried professional, especially when one considers the "new" professional associations.

Characteristics of Professional Associations

It is important to understand some of the characteristics of the professional associations discussed above. These associations have been emerging and developing for a number of years. They are, to a large extent, the result of the professional society's adjustment to meet the challenge posed by the union. The characteristics of these associations mold and shape the organizational efforts of these associations.

The programs of these associations reflect broad thinking about professional activities and functions. These professional associations have a much broader range of interests than do unions who have been concerned (primarily) with economic matters. It must be pointed out that these associations have broader interests than the "pure" professional societies.

These associations contain a wide variety and range of people, including professionals who are managers and supervisors. This has caused the unions to say that these associations are employer dominated and, therefore, pay inadequate attention to grievances. The wide range of professional people in these associations can result in a loss of efficiency insofar as collective bargaining is concerned.

This comes in part from the wide range of interests and positions of the professional membership within the society. The interests the association must serve run the range from the study orientation of some professionals, to the management orientation of others.

These associations engage in only limited collective bargaining and, at least on paper, reject the strategy of the strike. The vigor of the program of these associations tends to differ geographically, mainly, because of regional economic differences. It is important to note that these professional associations tend to emphasize local action and criticize the union as being Washington run. In fact, there appears to be considerable hostility in the relations of these associations with the union in selected fields or professions. This, however, does not mean that these associations are necessarily hostile to the labor movement as such.

Professional societies and associations as a whole are genuinely non-political. They do support various political programs as do the unions.

Professional associations do engage in collective bargaining, but only of a limited nature, especially the professional associations of nurses. However, competition with trade unions, changes in relationships with other groups, and poor conditions in the place of work and in salaries may force these associations into a more positive position for carrying out collective bargaining.

Reaction of Professional Societies to White Collar Unionization

The organizational activities of professional societies, or

professional organizations, antedates the trade union's effort to organize white collar and professional workers. Trade unions stepped into the picture of professional worker organization as a consequence of the number of such workers and of the proportion of these professionals employed in industry, as well as of the consequences of economic depressions, followed by the "failure of salaried groups to maintain their standards as a result of inflationary prices"² Thus, a keen competition developed between the professional society, on the one hand, and the trade union, on the other, causing an organizational war, which is still waged by the two groups against each other. The trade unions began the organization of professionals with some success following the great depression. The reaction of professional societies was immediate although of a defensive nature.

The professional societies have been largely opposed to collective bargaining mainly because of the difference between a professionals work and responsibility and the work and responsibility of the large, unidentified body of workers with which the unions are concerned. Professional associations maintain that professionals have a responsibility to the public, while unions have no such responsibility toward consumers.

Status is also an important foundation upon which professional societies and associations rest. In fact, although their wages may sometimes be lower than those of the blue collar worker, professionals have often been very sensitive to status, "professional ethics," advancement through personal merit and professional solidarity.

2. H. R. Northrup, "Insights into Labor Issues," p. 157.

Professional societies have been in a position to take considerable advantage from factors of a psychological nature and have adapted their tactics accordingly in their battle against unions, often with a remarkable degree of success.

Professional Associations Tactics

To check the growth of unionization among professionals which gained momentum as a result of the economic pangs of the thirties, professional societies felt that they could no longer rely solely on the defensive strategy consisting in the appeal to the professionals middle-class outlook towards unions, professional solidarity and so forth. Consequently they attacked unions by gradually engaging in collective bargaining, thus encroaching on the domain of the trade unions. However, professional societies still are opposed to collective bargaining and consequently their use of collective bargaining has been quite limited. Initially they resisted the necessity of adopting collective bargaining by adopting tactics such as the gaining of a decision by the National Labor Relations Board providing that professionals could not be included in a collective-bargaining unit with production workers unless they approved of their inclusion in the unit.

It is interesting to note that the effectiveness of a professional society's role is not so important among professions that are predominately composed of salaried professionals.

What has been the primary difficulty with collective bargaining by professional associations of societies is the joint presence of both the professionals and their supervisors or employers in the collective bargaining unit. Often professional societies cannot

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legally bargain for their members because of this. They have had to form bargaining units composed exclusively of professional em-
ployees to employ this tactic against the union. The American Society of Civil Engineers in 1943 established committees to act as bargaining agents for professional engineers. These committees were delegated solely to and composed of employee members of the society. The American Nurses Association has also separated its membership for this purpose. This has demonstrated a new tendency or thinking, professional solidarity does not necessarily obliterate economic differences.

The presence of administrators in the association has been a characteristic of teachers associations which are often dominated by these administrators. This makes some authorities question the effectiveness of such an organization in servicing the interests of the group they represent.

Professional associations have also employed other tactics against the union. They seek to control entry into the professional field, they seek to administer training programs and apply limited economic pressure on employers. Independent employees' unions have been, although somewhat reluctantly, sanctioned by professional societies, with the express provision that they will not be "dominated" by any "non-professional group. The American Chemical Society seems to support a union of professionals, controlled by the professionals, formed to effectively pursue collective bargaining for the professional. However, these independent groups formed for collective bargaining have not been wide spread.

By and large, however, professional societies do not seek to

directly influence the working conditions of their members. They maintain their position of opposition to unionization and to collective bargaining.

Union Tactics

The trade unions approach to the organization of white collar workers and of professionals in particular has in many instances actually aided the professional societies.

"The root of union-professional society antagonisms and fears are not difficult to discover. They stem on the one hand from the conservative, middle-class outlook of the professional persons; and, on the other, from the failure of unions to adopt techniques, policies, and programs to the professional level. The "after all, we are all workers" approach has served to alienate many professional workers from the labor movement. Unionism's endeavor to organize professional personnel by appeals to worker solidarity when professionals regard themselves as a group set above the common herd, has been a tactic as self-defeating as it has been persistent. Combined with the professional's middleclass distaste for trade unionism in general, it has created the demand for a "different type" of collective bargaining agent, and thus opened up the field to the professional society."³

The Union, by in large, has failed to recognize that the professional is career oriented and not class conscious, which seems to have been the approach unions generally have taken. There is a wide gap between the professionals concept of himself and his work and the concept the typical production worker has of himself. This difference is important. Unions, under fire of outspoken criticism,

3. Northrup, Op. cit. p. 157.

are gradually modifying their methods and approaches. They, however have run into stiff opposition from professional associations which enjoy the following and support of the professional person.

Technology is going to play a role in the efforts of unions to organize the professional. Technology will tend to down grade the status of some professionals. This may very well cause some professionals to turn to unions to gain the satisfactions they feel are due them.

Another factor which might enhance the effectiveness of unions is their increasing acceptance by the middle-class person in our society, who has in the past often had a less than complimentary view of unions.

Conclusions

The status of some professionals will tend to decline, especially among the salaried professionals, as more and more people enter the professional fields. The salaried position among some professionals, which is increasing, does not carry as much prestige as the position of the independent professional. There has been a general lessening of anti-collective bargaining sentiment among professional societies, although some still officially take a position of opposition to collective bargaining.

It is apparent that professionals will someday be organized, but it is unlikely that trade unions, as they exist today will be very instrumental in accomplishing this task. The increase in salaried professionals appears to be the primary force that will eventually result in the organization of the professional.

"I am convinced that sooner or later organizations- unions

in one form or another- will emerge among these groups as well as for the more routine groups of white collar workers. When, for example, as is already the case, some firms come to employ batteries of 2,000, 3,000, or 4,000 engineers and technicians, the old notion of professional individuality is bound to give way to the needs of group representation."⁴

However, the associations that evolve for professionals will have special characteristics. They will be concerned with a wide variety of matters and not predominately with economic matters. They will be equipped to represent and protect the interests of the professionals than are the professional associations and societies of today.

⁴. Everett M. Kassalow, "Occupational Frontiers of Trade Unionism in the U.S.", p.208

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