

Collective Bargaining between School Boards and Teachers: A Social-Dramaturgical Interpretation

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Les conventions collectives en milieu scolaire donnent naissance à des conflits qui mettent aux prises les syndicats d'enseignant et les conseils scolaires. La recherche en pédagogie n'a pas jusqu'à présent trouvé de solutions pour calmer les appréhensions des responsables de l'administration et de l'élaboration des politiques. La raison en est que les théoriciens, refusant d'aller au coeur du problème, n'ont pas touché à deux éléments importants: on n'a pas tenu compte de la conception qu'on se faisait de la personne — un être incapable de faire preuve de jugement — et on a évité de remettre en question certaines structures administratives qu'on considérait sans failles. Le résultat est prévisible: on blâme les individus et les groupes; on les accuse de se conduire de façon non rationnelle, immature et égoïste.

Cette étude veut proposer une autre façon de poser le problème: c'est une sociologie de l'action qui met l'emphasis sur l'intentionnalité des personnes et sur la recherche en vue d'une plus grande responsabilité.

INTRODUCTION

During the past 15 years collective bargaining with increasingly militant teachers' associations has generated considerable perplexity for school board administrators, school trustees, and provincial education authorities. Uncertainty as to the nature of the impact of teachers' strikes upon student achievement is matched by a host of concerns about the salary determination process itself.

Questions are essentially of a problems-issues genre and consequently yield only a fragmentary understanding of the essential nature of collective bargaining between school boards and teachers. Such questions are: Should compulsory arbitration replace the right to strike/lockout? Is final-offer selection a more productive vehicle for dispute settlement than traditional arbitration? Does provincial-level bargaining constitute a viable alternative to regional or local negotiations? Would bi-level bargaining offer a workable compromise? To what extent is it possible to construct objective economic indices that would comprise a basis for salary court awards that would supersede collective bargaining entirely?

Research in educational administration has not yielded a comprehensive theoretical appraisal of collective bargaining between school boards and teachers. Harrison (Note 1) surveyed bargaining trends in Alberta during

the nineteen sixties. For the same period, Johnson (Note 2) examined the extent to which the Alberta School Trustees' Association (ASTA) and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) achieved their respective bargaining objectives. In 1968 Muir completed a comprehensive survey of labor relations in the Canadian education sector. He summarized structural arrangements whereby school teachers' salaries are established in the 10 provinces. He was unable to establish a correlation between the introduction of collective bargaining and the achievement of large increases in teachers' salaries. Case studies have been undertaken to examine the negotiation process by which particular disputes between teachers' and trustees' associations have been resolved. Moreover, the historical development of these organizations has been traced in most provinces. What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive conceptualization of collective bargaining between school boards and teachers.

The net effect of this theoretical vacuum has been to deprive researchers and commentators of the analytical tools that are required to generate sensitivity to the philosophical underpinnings of a research problem.

A FIELD STUDY OF INTERACTION RELATED TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Setting for the Study

Since 1941, Alberta public-school teachers have negotiated collective agreements with school boards under the same labor code as that which applies to private-sector employees. The statute is *The Alberta Labour Act*. The teachers' legal bargaining agent, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), boasts a 22,000 compulsory membership including all teachers and principals employed by public and separate school boards. In 1974, the province's 147 school boards held membership in the Alberta School Trustees' Association (ASTA). Subject to an "opting out" provision, membership is quasi-compulsory. The provincial Department of Education deducts membership fees from local school-board grants and forwards this amount to the ASTA. School boards are required to "check off" teachers' membership dues for the ATA, although the association is responsible for collection of its own strike-fund levies.

School boards in Alberta rely on two basic revenue sources. In 1975, the provincial School Foundation Program Plan (SFPP) and other provincial grants from general revenue accounted for 71.7% of their revenue. A provincial levy on corporate property supplied a further 9.1% through the SFPP. The second revenue source is the local school board's supplementary requisition on the local property-tax base. In 1975 the latter accounted for 15.44% of board revenue. Annual escalation in funding from both components has been subject to provincial regulation since 1970.

Collective bargaining is conducted locally as well as regionally. It occurs regionally when school boards exercise their statutory right to form

employers' associations. Seven School Authorities Associations (SAAs) operated for regional collective bargaining purposes in 1974. They encompassed 59 school boards and produced collective agreements governing terms and conditions of employment for 5600 teachers in Alberta.

The Alberta Department of Labour is responsible for administration of the statutory dispute-settlement mechanism applicable to both the private and the education sector. Its Board of Industrial Relations (BIR) personnel and the Minister of Labour play crucial roles in adapting the conciliation procedures to the school board situation. Essentially, conciliation requires that management and labor desist from lockouts and strikes until fact-finding and reporting have been undertaken. The labor code, revised in 1973, allows three options that may be pursued at ministerial discretion ostensibly to bring the weight of public opinion to bear on disputing school boards and teachers.

Evolution of the Research Problem

The study was originally cast in the "issues-problems" mold. Its spur was perplexity, expressed by a senior official of the Alberta Department of Labour. "Why is it," he asked, "that they (school trustees and teachers) don't seem to be able to settle their (collective bargaining) differences without first running to us and to the Legislature when things are tough?"

As initially perceived, the study was local in focus, involving only two groups — teachers and their school board counterparts. At the heart of the matter, it was presumed, was a flaw in the capacity of the groups to engage in reasonable dialogue and compromise. A systems perspective located the conceptual focus for the study in the "conversion process" of the education-industrial-relations system (Craig, Note 3). This political process model (Easton, 1965) implied that the study's essential task was to examine malfunctions in a social mechanism. Theoretically, the source of the pathology was the process mediating societal inputs and system within-puts for the purpose of producing outputs. Initially, therefore, the study proposed explanation of a presumed systemic malfunction that accounts for prolonged collective bargaining and impasses. For major findings, it anticipated "identification of *forces* that bear upon school board decisions with respect to collective bargaining."

These hopes were not realized. Field research experience exposed substantive limitations in the systems-oriented perspective. Notwithstanding its schematic and graphic elegance, the process model obstructed authentic portrayal of interaction in the education industrial relations milieu. The sentence underlying relationships in the milieu eluded the model. The model's profound shortcomings were shown by the gulf between what it predicted ought to exist and what investigation actually encountered. It diverted inquiry toward a search for constraints militating against reasonable accommodations characteristic of a "healthy" system. In the field,

however, systemic strain toward harmony and “balance of power” was not a product of some invisible hand. Instead, the researcher witnessed a controlled order. Underlying the illusion of organic balance exists an order that is secured through exploitive encounters, in which the power of the participants is unequal.

This set of circumstances proved amenable to conceptualization in terms offered by Erving Goffman’s (1959) social dramaturgy. Of particular relevance to the datum was Lyman and Scott’s (1970, 1975) game derivative of Goffman’s theatrical perspective. In the sphere of studies in educational administration, T. Barr Greenfield’s (Note 4) critique of theory and research proved fortuitous for the study’s eventual reporting format. Greenfield summarizes two views of social reality — the first being that upon which the present study was initially based and the second being that which the inquiry discovered to be more compelling. “The crux of the issue,” he observes,

... is whether social reality is based upon naturally-existing systems or upon human invention of social forms. Social reality is usually construed as a natural and necessary order which, as it unfolds, permits human society to exist and people within it to meet their basic needs. Alternately social reality may be construed as images in the mind of man having no necessary or inevitable forms except as man creates them and endows them with reality and authority. In one perspective, organizations are natural objects . . . , in the other, organizations are cultural artifacts. (pp. 8-10)

Greenfield emphasizes the importance of synthesizing subjective and objective data. These qualitatively different information sets he categorizes as “internal” and “external” variables. Encompassed within the present study, these two sets of variables yielded a series of subproblems.

The Problem

Ultimately, the study probed interaction underlying collective agreements between school boards and the Alberta Teachers’ Association. It emphasized the extent and nature of involvement of trustees, school board administrative staff, the Alberta School Trustees’ Association, and consultants hired by school boards. In addition, account was taken of other identities with whom these parties interacted during the course of negotiations.

Subproblems — External Variables

1. Which individuals and groups were noteworthy for their participation in the general sphere of education collective bargaining?
2. What basic formal structures characterized the overall organization of collective bargaining between school boards and the Alberta Teachers’ Association?
3. What political, economic, and social phenomena were discernible in

the general environment within which school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association negotiate collective agreements?

Subproblems – Internal Variables

1. What interaction characteristics were manifest in decision-making processes involving individuals and groups *within* particular collective bargaining entities such as local school boards and the Alberta School Trustees' Association?
2. What interaction characteristics typified relationships *between* collective bargaining entities such as the provincial government, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta School Trustees' Association?

Conceptual Framework

The study posits educational governance as resembling theatre and game-like performance. The dramatisitic perspective of Goffman's (1959) social dramaturgy is further elaborated in a game sense by Lyman and Scott (1970). Its origins are traceable to Evreinoff (1927) and Burke (1945).

The dramatisitic perspective offers the type of alternative sought by Mouzelis (1975) and Perrow (1972) who deplore shortcomings in the general state of organization theory and research. Perrow is particularly intent upon discovering conceptual perspectives that allow scholars to ask pertinent questions with regard to the justification for organizational existence and the power which organizations wield in society. Michel Crozier (1973) asserts that power constitutes "a fundamental universal phenomenon, one which now constitutes the last taboo in the Western world" (p. vii). He identifies it as "the basic problem in all collective life" (p. 19). Like Dennis Wrong (1968), Crozier argues that research which probes the crucial "facts of power" must focus upon interaction processes. Those occurring within the overall organizational setting are of particular importance in Crozier's estimation. Manifest interest in power and alternative sociological paradigms (Lukes, 1974; Clegg, 1975, 1976) was precipitated by Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). It is a reaction to the failure of traditional perspectives to adequately predict or account for recent societal turbulence. The broad parameters of the new sociology are outlined by Alvin Gouldner (1970). He alludes to:

... the resurgence and renewed vitality in sociology of various models of Marxism and neo-Marxism; the elaborated development of Erving Goffman's unique social dramaturgy; the spread of Harold Garfinkel's ethno-methodology and its growth from programmatic statement to concrete studies such as those by David Sudnow, Harvey Sacks and others; the very important new meta-theoretical work by Alan Blum; Peter Winch's provocative sociological version of Wittgenstein; and the powerful work and growth of interest in the 'newer' generation of the Frankfurt School. (p. 158).

These developments suggest a mode for inquiry in educational administra-

tion that is less accepting of prerogatives hitherto asserted as "common sense" and consequently outside the realm of study by scholars in this field.

Methodology

The field study incorporated a diverse range of techniques. It explored the perspective of those working to promote the school boards' collective bargaining interests. Continuous observation was undertaken at the ASTA's head office in Edmonton between November 1973 and April 1974. Commencing during that period and extending into May of 1974, investigation followed a complete set of regional negotiations. Other research tasks included attendance at trustee workshops, conferences, and conventions, as well as perusal of documents and press clippings. Interviews with school trustees, school board administrators, and "knowledgeable others" in the education industrial relations milieu complemented information secured through direct observation. Opinionaire responses were elicited from participants attending collective bargaining caucuses in six different board jurisdictions.

EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE AS THEATRE

Collective bargaining in the Alberta education setting is more clearly comprehensible when viewed within the context of the control of the province's educational enterprise generally. Its fundamental dynamic is analogous to that evidenced in a theatrical spectacle.

Dramatic portrayal involves behavior that is constrained partially by a script, although the script does not necessarily preclude extemporaneous performance. Dramatic portrayal is the product of several factors. For this study's purposes, two are considered paramount. The first is the vital importance of behind-the-scenes interaction which substantially shapes the nature of the script upon which onstage performance is predicated. The second involves the talents which specific participants utilize in creatively interpreting the script.

Collective bargaining between individual school boards and the ATA exemplifies frontstage action. Backstage action is akin to political-interest-group activity pursued by the ASTA and ATA with such entities as the provincial government, the cabinet, individual ministers, and the civil service. Political-interest-group persuasion entails dramatic performance that incorporates frontstage and backstage action in microcosm.

Backstage-frontstage differentiation separates behavior involving provincial-level exchange with respect to educational funding and general regulation from interaction that immediately surrounds the local/regional bargaining-table relationship. Local collective bargaining involves extemporaneous portrayal against a "backdrop" comprising events arising in the broad social-economic-political domain. Against this broad canvas, teachers and school boards are depicted in the dramaturgic analogy as

actors. Their offstage and frontstage interaction resembles game performance.

The Collective Bargaining Theatrical Company: Backstage Participants

Parameters for onstage performance are established behind the scenes, by producer, director(s), and an administrative staff including stage manager, script personnel, and stage hands. Box office success and reputation are presumably prime motivators. To the extent that collective bargaining in Alberta by school boards resembles staged performance, the provincial government, the Ministers of Education and Labour, and the provincial civil service perform respectively as producer, directors, and backstage staff.

Collective bargaining by local school boards is “stage managed” through provincial government control over two crucial variables, finance and conciliation. School board finance is subject to government control through the School Foundation Program Plan and provincial regulations concerning supplementary requisitions. Conciliation is a fact-finding and reporting process over which the Minister of Labour exercises authority. A school board and the ATA may not resort to punitive action until such time as the conciliation steps have been exhausted. Utilizing these, as well as other constitutional prerogatives, the central authority is admirably placed to impose its particular stamp on school board collective bargaining. As in the theatre, the producer and director of the education collective bargaining spectacle stand to gain from public appreciation of onstage performance. In this case they seek support at the polls and/or public willingness to assume the tax burden of teachers’ salaries.

One Theatrical Agent and Its Clients

School boards have created the Alberta School Trustees’ Association to influence provincial government decisions. The ASTA aspires to a function resembling that of a theatrical agent. Collective bargaining services are but one of its responsibilities. Its Economic Services department seeks to facilitate communication between boards, to co-ordinate collective bargaining, to shape board policies with respect to bargaining issues, and to socialize trustees to the realities of collective bargaining.

Local school trustees are intent upon preserving perceived local prerogatives and therefore resist intrusion where they see the ASTA as a threat. Internal conflict also undermines the ASTA’s capacity to rival the ATA. There is ambiguity surrounding commitment to local school board autonomy as opposed to the need for one body as a cohesive political interest group. A further difficulty is the considerable mistrust with which local school trustees view the ASTA and particular officials.

The ASTA’s Economic Services department suffers from lack of credibility. The department is denied access to tasks whose successful execution

would enhance its officers' prestige. Staff officers perform vital yet unspectacular functions, and suffer overbearing scrutiny by the Association's elected executive and other individuals who hold office in ASTA's various councils and committees. Credibility with client boards, as well as with the ATA, is crucial to staff officers' effectiveness. But a self-fulfilling prophecy operates to prevent enhancement of their status. Because of the ASTA's high rate of staff attrition, staff officers are hired to perform a subservient role that is perpetuated by a group of school trustees who have the time and resources to continuously audit Association work routines. The Economic Services staff is typically assigned tasks designed to supply elected officials the where-with-all for public performance. The result is deterioration in morale and a docility that is counterproductive to the ASTA's purposes as an agency.

Venue, Backdrop, and Stage Props

The amphitheatre in which collective bargaining performance is staged poses challenges to school boards. The obstacles parallel those which confront the actor in exercising stagecraft. There are facilitators and inhibitors. Location, and the broad spectrum of social, economic, and political issues, are factors around which negotiators calculate and execute performance. Bargaining-unit characteristics differ according to size of ATA locals, local or regional organization, rural or urban location, public- or separate-school organization, location within Alberta, geographic characteristics, and variation in school governance. Regional bargaining and problems arising from amalgamation of school with municipal governance under *The County Act*, create special bargaining complexities.

Other backdrop dimensions may impede or facilitate convincing performance. Inflation was a subject of volatile public debate during 1973 and 1974. Boards had little choice but to accept the Canadian Consumer Price Index as a measuring stick against which their salary offers would be evaluated. Local, provincial, and national economic conditions mirrored inflationary pressures, reinforcing the latter's impact on bargaining-table behavior. Salary settlements in other provincial jurisdictions were somewhat less influential. On the other hand, school boards sought precedents against which to pitch their own salary concessions. They listed contracts completed with the ATA in neighboring bargaining units. The principle of comparability operated virtually as an "iron law" for indexing adequacy of salary offers.

Typology of Actor Involvement

The ideal-type construct serves to delineate patterns of involvement in school board collective bargaining. It distinguishes variation in the nature and extent of onstage performance by school trustees, school board officials, ASTA staff, and consultants hired by school boards. Star performer,

supporting actor, gladiator, and chorus ideal-types are but four possible categorizations.

The *star performer* prefers activities that yield high public visibility. This individual is committed to diverse public-service interests. To maintain or enhance prestige and power, the star performer endeavors persistently to penetrate key decision points. He/she strives to achieve access to the latest information on a broad range of matters. Public recognition and credibility are vital for the star performer.

The ASTA is a convenient vehicle for an individual thus motivated. Collective bargaining and associated political-interest-group activity attract star performers. The ASTA's effectiveness in these two domains suffers because star performers find it difficult to establish sufficient mutuality of interest. Bargaining-table leadership is one office not universally coveted by star performers. The star performer's purposes may be accomplished equally well by retaining leadership in school board negotiating caucuses. In this way maximum publicity is ensured without risk of the unpopularity frequently befalling the chief negotiator.

A second typological category includes individuals who speak on behalf of school boards at the bargaining table — the gladiators. *The gladiator* may be a school trustee, a school board official, an ASTA staff officer, or a hired consultant. This individual faces two basic hurdles. In the first place, agreement with the ATA is eventually necessary. Secondly, the agreement must be "sold" to a school board negotiating committee and the school board itself. These objectives imply a capacity to maintain caucus discipline. Major obstacles present themselves. A star performer may demand to share leadership, if not to dominate the caucus. Vital collective bargaining information may also be prized as a vehicle for furthering other individual trustees' personal political and social aspirations. Therefore, the gladiator must be prepared to war on two fronts. Finally, the gladiator for whom credibility is crucial strives to secure unequivocal support from the school board.

Current, accurate information is prized by star performers and gladiators. *The supporting actor* supplies it and is, therefore, indispensable. Ironically the school board administrators and ASTA staff officers who are typically supporting actors discover that the tasks that make their services valuable also contain the seeds of their insecurity. Access to information is also a key to power. Such access places them in potential conflict with star performers and gladiators, who resent being upstaged. Conflict is latent within school board negotiation teams. It diminishes the ASTA's effectiveness and exerts a debilitating influence on local school board collective bargaining.

Most school trustees and school board officials resemble the theatrical *chorus* in ancient Greek drama. Participation in collective bargaining is only marginal. Trustee activity is confined to such tasks as cursory

examination of board proposals, witnessing of intermittent negotiating committee reports, and endorsement of memoranda of agreement. Extensive participation by trustees is precluded by the need for confidentiality. Moreover, many school trustees have neither the time nor the desire to embroil themselves in the frequently prolonged negotiation process.

Work stoppages or threats of strikes by teachers provide the rare occasions on which chorus participation in collective bargaining is intensified. These situations create certain difficulties: the niceties of particular salary offers and counter offers are not easily grasped by individuals who traditionally have been kept at a distance from bargaining-table affairs; and secrecy is difficult to enforce when public clamor forces the chorus to actively involve itself in collective bargaining.

Game-like Interaction Circumscribes Onstage Performance

Lyman and Scott's (1970) derivative of Goffman's social dramaturgy countenances stable social action as comprising at least four "functionally independent, empirically overlapping, but analytically distinct" game-like sequences. They describe exploitation, information, relationship, and face games (pp. 37-63). Exploitation games conducted between the provincial government, the ASTA, and the ATA are described in this section.

Exploitation-game exchanges relate particularly to the question of school finance, which manifests serious ramifications for the course of collective bargaining. The extent and nature of annual revisions by the Department of Education to regulations governing instructional grants and the supplementary requisition create a climate of feeling with respect to equitability of salary offers that school boards cannot ignore.

Between 1971 and 1975 the provincial government, the ASTA, and the ATA engaged in a series of phased game-like exchanges. Each sought to extract some measure of effective compliance with its particular situational definition of the backstage arena. Eventually, the three-way contest was modified with emergence of mutuality of interest between the ASTA and the ATA. Ensuing game-like exchanges became increasingly bilateral. The latter is indicative, not so much of total unanimity between the ASTA and ATA, but that a positive relationship game was proceeding simultaneously.

The Department of Education in 1972 sought a new form of compliance with its definition of appropriate fiscal restraint. Previously compliance had been won with the 1970 revised School Foundation Program Plan. It entailed an approximate limit of 6% on annual escalations in school board spending. While moving to "soft" control on school board spending in 1972, the government portrayed an apparent commitment to local school board autonomy and a studied indifference toward local collective bargaining. After each of three annual exploitation-game exchanges, it adjusted SFPP grants and its controls governing annual increases in local supple-

mentary requisitions. In so doing, it indirectly stabilized the annual rate of increase in Alberta teachers' salaries.

The Minister and Department of Education officials avoided specific reference to teacher salary increases when discussing these annual adjustments. They asserted that these were matters to be settled in negotiations between teachers and school boards. Nevertheless, advanced publicity and ceremony surrounding the Minister of Education's announcements of revised regulations provided those requiring wage and salary guidelines with a prominent and convenient measuring stick. The principle of comparability served to reinforce a trend toward settlement universality flowing from "lighthouse" agreements. The latter approximated the figure prominently featured in Ministerial pronouncements. That is to say, 7.5%, 9%, and 15% became the percentage increases against which teacher salary contracts were evaluated, between 1973 and 1975 inclusive.

This capacity to establish a situational definition in terms of "soft" control was complemented by positive and negative incentives offered by the provincial authority. The ASTA and school boards were admonished to earn equal partnership with the provincial government and municipalities on the basis of demonstrated fiscal and political astuteness. The Minister emphasized the increased personal self-esteem that trustees would experience once they had displayed these qualities. Positive reinforcement in this motivationally based appeal was evidenced by his praise of school board budget surpluses. He intimated that further improvement would increase his disposition to eliminate supplementary requisition controls, as well as to grant boards access to the local tax base.

The ASTA's and ATA's experience of the government's "hard" identity during the 1970 fiscal retrenchment had vividly illustrated its capacity to invoke constitutional authority, when pressed, in an exploitation encounter. They strove to avoid a reoccurrence of this, and instead sought subtle alternatives to direct confrontation.

The two associations parried the government's shift to "soft control" by cultivating the notion of SFPP adjustments as constituting "salary guidelines." They emphasized the contradiction between "soft control" and the Minister's alleged commitment to local school board autonomy. This tactic failed to force a total retreat. Instead, the government "softened" plebiscite regulations governing supplementary requisitions. The provincial authorities insisted that under optional plebiscites, local school boards retained discretion to pay salary increases exceeding the rate associated with annual school grant increases.

The ASTA and the ATA rejected this argument, asserting that freedom to use the supplementary requisition was more apparent than real. They insisted that the "mind set" generated by the Minister's annual announcements was tantamount to an indication to the local ratepayers that the Department of Education opposed supplementary requisition increases

beyond the provincially designated figure. Both associations followed this parry (or deflection) with thrusts that sought to impose their own identity definitions. For instance, the ATA labelled the government as exclusive “holder of the purse strings.” This ploy provided an avenue for holding the government accountable for alleged deterioration in teacher morale and the quality of education. The ASTA, for its part, emphasized the government’s moral responsibility to supply funds for “quality” education.

Motivational ploys supplemented their situational and identity-oriented strategies. ASTA officials praised the Minister for statesmanlike actions. At trustee functions his appearances were welcomed in phrases that lauded him as a “friend of school boards.” The ASTA reminded the Minister that a public satisfied with a quality product from the province’s schools would inevitably express its appreciation at the provincial polls.

The ATA’s announcements of salary agreements also implied positive and negative reinforcement. It implied restoration of labor-management harmony and praised the Minister’s timely intervention with SFPP increases. It linked particular salary agreement increases with the current percentage increase in funding. Negative reinforcement from the ATA typically involved stern hints of impending province-wide strikes and bargaining-table conflict. These ominous predictions characteristically preceded each new collective bargaining round.

Accord between the Spectacle’s Promoters

Backstage game-like encounters are pursued with vigor and single-mindedness of purpose. Nevertheless, the major backstage identities are alert to the importance of preserving the arena and of maintaining the integrity of each participant’s capacity to engage in future games. The government officials, the ATA, and the ASTA emphasize “winning” or “losing” only to the extent that such rhetoric is required to cement relationships with their respective constituencies. They display tacit mutual understanding of the need for such posturing. When anarchy threatens, each backstage participant tempers its zeal. The sacrifice is made in favor of preservation of the overall order.

A further dimension of the means by which the major backstage participants conspire to cement tacitly agreed-upon power relations under the guise of the operation of an organic order is their participation in the mandated approach to collective bargaining dispute settlement. The latter is considered in the following section. It describes a mechanism that ostensibly encourages school boards and teachers to engage in collective bargaining in such a way as to reach agreement at the local level.

When school boards and teachers engage in protracted bargaining, precipitate third-party intervention, and resort to the strike/lockout, frontstage performers are made the butt of audience hostility. There exists a predisposition to deplore their intransigence, unreasonableness,

and ineptitude. The dramatistic perspective reveals that the existing conciliation mechanism cloaks the means by which the backstage participants govern collective bargaining outcomes while increasing the frontstage actors' apparent culpability. Thus the local actors' capacity for self-reliance is undermined. The loss of confidence stems from the adverse criticism of their local bargaining efforts, as well as from a need for political services that their provincially organized associations provide in the context of conciliation.

PUBLIC POLICY GOVERNING DISPUTES ARISING FROM COLLECTIVE BARGAINING BETWEEN SCHOOL BOARDS AND TEACHERS

Regulations governing collective bargaining disputes between school boards and teachers are articulated in several provincial labor codes. In 1941 Alberta school boards and the ATA were made subject to the conciliation clauses encompassed in private-sector legislation, subsequently designated the *Alberta Labour Act*. Fact-finding is a requirement of the *Teachers and School Boards Collective Negotiations Act* passed by the Ontario legislature in 1975. Though formulated three decades subsequent to the Alberta legislation, the Ontario statute constitutes but a variation on the same theme.

These acts reflect the traditional Canadian approach to labor contract disagreements. The tradition stems from passage in federal parliament of the *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, 1907*. The latter's dispute resolution of conciliation clauses articulated two fundamental requirements for management and labor locked in a bargaining impasse. In the first place, they were required to submit the dispute to investigation by a fact-finder whose report would be made public. The investigation tribunal consisted of a management nominee, a labor nominee, and a chairman appointed by mutual agreement. These tripartite fact-finding tribunals have become known as conciliation boards (a term which is a misnomer). Secondly, the 1907 legislation contained an innovation that has exerted a profound influence on the collective bargaining process. The Act prohibited management and labor from instituting a lockout or strike until after publication of the fact-finder's report.

Notwithstanding adoption of this dispute settlement mechanism in the Alberta education sector, school boards and the ATA have become locked in protracted bargaining with disconcerting frequency. Moreover, third-party intervention is commonplace. During the nineteen seventies, strikes have increased in frequency, scale, and severity.

The popular justification for compulsory fact-finding and reporting of disputes between school boards and teachers is based on three interrelated assumptions: (1) that an objective reality resides at the heart of each bargaining item over which school boards and teachers remain in dis-

agreement, (2) that this objective reality is identifiable by a third party, and (3) that publication of the third party's findings is an event that will mobilize public opinion in such a way as to induce school boards and teachers to relinquish unreasonable bargaining positions.

1. The Nature of Reality in Teachers' Contract Disputes

Misapprehension exists as to the nature of "facts" elicited in the course of investigation of a dispute. Objectivity, according to the social dramaturgical framework, is less important than the capacity of one or several parties to create an illusion with respect to "the facts of the matter(s)."

For example, during the early nineteen seventies, the Alberta Minister of Education was confronted with the prospect of anarchy as inflation psychology undermined traditional benchmarks used to assess the equity of teachers' salary increases. He took advantage of the ASTA's and the ATA's vested interest in the maintenance of stability to create a new mind-set in which actors and the public audience invested credibility. The "facts" in question were anchored in percentage figures designated for instructional funding increases. Their usage as guidelines for establishing salary-increase equity was cemented in the general consciousness by media coverage of public forums provided by the ASTA and the ATA for the Minister. The percentages, 7.5%, 9%, and 15%, took on an aura of objectivity within the context of fact-finding between 1973 and 1975.

2. The Fact-Finder's Capacity to Reveal Objective Data

Two aspects of dispute investigation imply that the fact-finder's report reflects the outcome of a struggle to impose preferred sets of meanings on particular situations. The basic ingredient is convincing performance, which is only marginally related to the discovery of objective truth.

School boards and teachers view the conciliation process from a perspective different from that of the fact-finder and the provincial authority. Each group strives for common acceptance of its particular interpretation. Each approaches collective bargaining with a strategy that incorporates a particular view of dispute settlement.

For example, Alberta school board officials deplore the alleged propensity for fact-finders to escalate salary offers unfairly. Since they operate from a unique set of meanings that includes the certainty that "conciliation escalates," they embark upon collective bargaining intent on creating a reality for the fact-finder that will minimize the school board's potential loss at the fact-finder's hands.

The reality that the school board negotiators endeavor to create for the fact-finder is multidimensional: its basic ingredient of fiscal crisis is attributed to the unreasonableness of teachers' salary demands, adverse economic conditions, and imperatives dictated by government funding regulations.

An equally vital component is the illusion of commitment to good-faith bargaining. From the outset, the school board must be prudent in calculating periodic concessions at the bargaining table. On the one hand, the board acts judiciously in yielding sufficiently to impress the fact-finder that it has “moved.” These moves must not be so inconsequential as to afford the ATA an opportunity to arouse teachers’ and the public’s indignation. On the other hand, they should not be so magnanimous as to reflect adversely on the original offer or to compromise the board’s ultimate “saw-off” position.

The fact-finder’s orientation to the conciliation role is crucial. The investigator as the *tabula rasa* implied in the ideal is seldom encountered in actuality. In the first place, conciliation (in the strict sense of the term) and mediation are frequently undertaken by conciliation boards at the expense of their primary responsibility of fact-finding. Secondly, appointees bring to the fact-finding role a residue of experience that influences role performance. The appointment of lawyers to fact-finding tasks in the education sector has left its imprint on the conduct of hearings and the reports themselves. Bargaining between school boards and the ATA tends to be superseded in favor of advocacy for the third party’s benefit. Finally, the image of the fact-finder as the dispassionate seeker of objective truth is shattered by the circumstances pertaining to the fact-finder’s livelihood. The prudent fact-finder remains cognizant that reputation, career, and advancement are directly related to goodwill generated with school boards, teachers, and the government. Interpretation of this situation has a bearing on the fact-finder’s reporting of each contract dispute. In terms of the dramatic analogy, the fact-finder may be perceived, then, as a constructor of props to specifications that are acceptable to a variety of frontstage and backstage participants.

3. *The Role of Public Opinion and the Impact of Published Facts*

In the theatre, authentic costume and/or meticulously prepared sets do not automatically evoke sympathetic audience response. Similarly, participants in collective bargaining have found the public unpredictable in responding to fact-finders’ reports. For example, during 1975 the public in Metro Toronto remained generally hostile toward the position taken by secondary school teachers who eventually undertook a strike in an attempt to achieve salary increases substantially endorsed by a fact-finder.

Since a report’s substance may of itself be insufficient to galvanize the public to action, the participants take on the responsibility (as players) to elicit positive reaction — channelling favorable comments into the public’s consciousness while deflecting attention from (or undermining the credibility of) potentially harmful findings. Access to the media is crucial.

Conditions in the contemporary social environment exert a bearing on the extent to which public opinion may be affected by fact-finders’ reports.

Firstly, such matters as the energy crisis, inflation, unemployment, national unity, and hostage-taking tend to overshadow reports of disputes between teachers and school boards. Moreover, the frequency of disputes has diminished the news-story potential of strikes and lockouts. The vital capacity of the media to make news is a factor lacking in the equation that relies on the ideal of public opinion as the primary vehicle for encouraging good-faith bargaining. The news media's apparent preference for transitory, sensational, and superficial treatment of news stories is counter-productive to the ideal solution which relies upon an independently formed, well-reasoned body of citizen opinion.

Finally, the issues recently in dispute between school boards and teachers resist simple solutions. The scope of bargaining has expanded to embrace such complex matters as staff allocation, pupil-teacher ratios, and teachers' assigned duties. Comprehension of such matters may be difficult for the fact-finder, and the task of prudent judgment greatly compounded for the layman.

Suggestions for Review of Public Policy on Dispute Settlement

The foregoing critique suggests that fact-finding and reporting, as it is currently applied to contract disputes between school boards and teachers, is not achieving its potential as a device for inducing the parties to settle their differences without third-party intervention. At least two factors account for this. One is the theatrical nature of the enterprise of which fact-finding is a component. The second is its compulsory nature. That is, the parties commence bargaining confronted with the legal certainty that fact-finding must precede any initiative to strike or lockout.

These two conditions undermine the determination of negotiators for school boards and teachers to reach the meeting of the minds required for collective agreement. Instead, they are preoccupied with constructing bargaining postures. These edifices accentuate the differences between school board positions and teacher requests. They are arranged to impress third parties. Advocacy thus works against mutual accommodation. The school boards and teachers are enmeshed in a paradoxical situation where a compulsory dispute-settlement process has the effect of encouraging behavior that induces disputes. Conciliation is seen as an instrument for potential gain. Serious bargaining is postponed until after conciliation, when the teachers have "a strike vote in their pocket." At such a late juncture attitudes and positions have hardened to such an extent that genuine bargaining is precluded.

Commonly, the policy-making and administrative approaches to the dilemma are *remedial*. Time lines, for example, are instituted within which school boards and teachers are required to agree. Both parties are subjected to overt and covert threats of punitive action by the authorities. The imminence of a provincial take-over of bargaining is emphasized with those

who fear loss of local autonomy. School board officials are counselled that the Minister of Education's displeasure over teachers' work stoppages may result in curtailment of instructional grants. There is an implied directive that both groups cease their "game playing" and "play acting." These are deplored as evidence of irresponsibility and unreasonableness, for which *remedies* are required.

The social-dramaturgy frame of reference offers an alternative means of addressing the task of policy making. Within its purview, theatrical or game-like performance constitutes an integral part of social reality. A predisposition to behave in such a way does not constitute a pathology. It emerges as a vital "given" to be taken into account by those constructing policy which is intended to be congruent with the meaning constructions of those who are to be governed.

Essentially at stake is the question of the seriousness of the commitment of policy-makers to the creation of a milieu in which local school boards and teachers' locals are encouraged to seek mutual accord without precipitating third-party intervention. In the dramatistic perspective, a genuine commitment to local free collective bargaining between school boards and teachers is seen to be manifested if fewer (rather than more) predictable constraints are imposed on the parties.

To begin with, greater flexibility in the financing of education at the local level is needed. Solutions must be sought beyond the local property-tax method. The public, as local audience, requires a more effective vehicle for registering its response to the education drama. One possibility is a tax-rebate scheme that affords citizens discretion locally in registering preferences among a variety of social-service alternatives, of which the marginal education dollar would be one.

Secondly, greater uncertainty should surround the bargaining process itself, in order to undermine the formulas that negotiators have developed to secure leverage from third-party intervention. A prerequisite for this is the separation of collective bargaining from dispute settlement. That is, the principle of "no contract, no work" should replace compulsory postponement of the strike/lockout pending fact-finding.

A policy which permits school boards and teachers to exercise discretion on lockouts and strikes immediately upon expiration of the previous agreement does not constitute a rejection of fact-finding. The device of fact-finding is merely relegated to a position of parity with alternative dispute-reconciliation strategies. In that setting its potential would be more fully realized.

Under such a policy, school boards and teachers would undertake bargaining without clear indication of that which may transpire if they fail to reach agreement. The only certainty would be the date upon which a strike or lockout could be legally undertaken. Major uncertainty would surround that which might transpire in the event that punitive action is

taken, or perhaps, not undertaken) at expiration of a current agreement. In the face of deliberately cultivated uncertainty, accommodation strategies assume a heretofore neglected importance.

A third and crucial aspect of the reform proposal is the new and creative role required of the provincial authorities. The transparent guise of detached observer would be superseded by a role in which the province's ultimate responsibility for order and good government would be translated into a repertoire of discretionary intervention strategies. Consequently, although the provincial authority would avoid direct bargaining involvement, it would be expected to exercise a prerogative in selecting from a broad range of strike/lockout settlement alternatives. One such selection might be the decision to desist from intervention in a dispute.

In addition to the possibility of fact-finding and reporting, the repertoire could include recourse to one or several traditional devices such as arbitration, final-offer selection, "cooling off" periods, mediation, and conciliation. Other unorthodox strategies might be included, such as that of supplying the parties a deadline beyond which the strike/lockout could not be declared. Even the device of drawing lots on final positions might be contemplated. Alternatively, the authority might designate settlements in particular industries as a base for indexing the salary agreement in dispute between a board and its school teachers.

Regardless of the strategy undertaken, the success of the proposed reform would hinge upon the meanings that school boards and teachers imposed on each situation. Creative and flexible participation by the provincial authority is necessary for the creation of a climate wherein efforts to reach mutual accord constitute a more pleasant prospect than the complexities of third-party intervention. In undertaking this highly political responsibility the provincial authority would be performing a role for which it has constitutional authority. Actually, the proposed role is a formalization of the one it currently executes in the backstage arena.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic perspective on school board collective bargaining lodges local negotiations within the broad context of educational governance. At the local level the dramaturgic analogy dispels the myth that school boards and teachers are essentially irrational, inept, and irresponsible in their pursuit of bargaining objectives. At the general level of educational governance the metaphor depicts the organization of collective bargaining and dispute settlement as an important means by which the actions of local school boards and teachers are regularized.

School boards and teachers are revealed as actors engaged in the task of coping resourcefully with structural constraints. Their reality is not one of external forces which precipitate automaton-like responses. Purposeful

thought and skilful portrayal underlie their behavior. It entails predictable reaction to specific incentives. On the other hand, response that is apparently automatic may mask a gesture that is deliberately calculated to impress an audience.

The theatrical element is exemplified in the school boards' approach to conciliation. Indeed, failure to recognize this characteristic of social dramaturgy has hindered the development of public policy that will facilitate more effective collective bargaining. This negative consequence suggests the wisdom of eliminating props around which negotiators have created formula-like performance, designed to precipitate intervention by a third party and to impress the third party. Removal of these "givens" from the negotiators' reality would open the way to strategies designed to accomplish a "meeting of minds" on specific issues.

Such proposals threaten the power of the parties whom the theatrical analogy describes as operating in the backstage arena. Consequently, without some alteration in the backstage power structure, the reforms stand little chance of implementation, much less, successful operation.

The conciliation mechanism as it governs deadlocks between school boards and the ATA is viewed within the dramatistic perspective as a means whereby order is maintained in the interests of the provincial authority as well as of those who control the school boards' and teachers' associations. Its predictable operation is a hedge against anarchy, notwithstanding the apparent conflicts which capture public attention periodically. The mechanism provides a ritual that legitimizes intervention by the three powerful interests. The ritual serves to deflect public hostility from the provincial-level groups. It affords opportunity for arbitrary disposition (through arbitration, order-in-council, special legislation, etc.) under the pretense that the local parties are unequal to the task entailed in co-operative decision-making. It conceals the possibility that irreconcilable differences do exist which can be contained only through the exercise of power by those who are favorably placed.

Finally, the dramatistic perspective is proposed as a means for creating a sensitivity to the ideological basis of research. Research ostensibly probes social reality, but social dramaturgy suggests that it merely provides participants with props for legitimizing the existing disposition of power. The present reappraisal proposes examination of such popularly accepted notions as balance of power, the brokerage function of constitutional authorities, and the organic image of social systems. The task entails rediscovery of the contribution to political theory of such writers as C. Wright Mills (1956), as well as scrutiny of recent developments in the exploration of the sociological discipline's philosophical roots (Dawe, 1970; Winspear, 1974). Such study can lead to increased awareness of limitations imposed upon social research as a consequence of the researcher's unexamined assumptions.

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