THE GRAND ILLUSION OF FACULTY INDEPENDENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Events in more recent years have reflected accelerating interest in the consideration of collective bargaining as a medium for expressing faculty positions. As examples, OSEA has held several chapter meetings on this subject, the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate has a committee currently studying it, both AAUP and OSEA have recently formed a joint committee for examining this topic, and an ever-widening number of faculties throughout the U.S. have turned to this type of vehicle for exercising their voices.

When collective bargaining is brought up in various private conversations with colleagues, it is soon discovered that the major hangup is the concern over the potential for damage to faculty independence and for tarnishing of the profession. There is a strong tradition among professors that a thing most cherished is this independence; that is, the ability to be one's own master.

My thesis in this Forum expression is best expressed by this simple challenge to you, my fellow faculty members: show me one single significant area where you truly can say that you are now your own boss.

To follow my line of reasoning, we can start with faculty conduct codes which, although assuredly overdue in some respects, pose serious threats to some basic professional freedoms via their opening the door to potentially capricious and otherwise harmful interpretations by some administrators. Next, there is the matter of attacks upon tenure and the serious consideration being given today to performing drastic surgery on this system.
Curricular development is still another area being eroded, with circumstances pointing toward gross invasion of this assumed stronghold. In particular, the growing role for budgetary elements in educational decision-making is making it abundantly clear that professional input can be overridden by administrators wielding budgetary clubs. Finally, one can note such other developments as the standards being laid down for faculty advancement without proper consideration of faculty viewpoints and the increasing talk about removing sabbatical privileges.

In terms of my earlier issued challenge, I am seriously concerned by the apparent apathy that exists among us in regard to these happenings. Is it possible that there are just not enough people who have been directly affected yet by these events? Alternately, is it merely a case of not keeping up with these changing times? As still another possible explanation for such apathy, are we afraid of reprisals for speaking out against these kinds of moves? Whatever the reason might be, I submit that, if we lay any claim at all to being professional people, then it is imperative that answers be given and that integrity thereby be maintained.

In thinking about such events this way, there will be those who will agree that conditions around us are worsening but will argue that collective bargaining, with its "union" connotations, is not the solution. To those who would so argue, it can be pointed out that actual experiences—especially in our own state—do not bear out this fear. For example, collective bargaining for non-academic public employees in Oregon has not been accompanied by militant, union-like tactics. Instead, the product has been marked improvement in employer-employee relationships and on a plane wherein responsibilities
and mutual respect have prevailed. As a reading on something closer to our own circumstances, it is of great interest to note that the Oregon State System of Higher Education has just recently signed its first collective bargaining contract dealing with faculty personnel, this being the one negotiated with OSEA on behalf of University of Oregon faculty people located at Tongue Point. The true significance of this particular contract lies with its providing at least a partial answer to those who believe that faculty conditions are so specialized that collective bargaining will not work. In other words, it is a real eye opener to consider the content of this Tongue Point agreement.

In summary, my message is one of urging all of you to listen better than you have so far, as the discussion of collective bargaining proceeds toward more definitive lines. I especially urge that you think more carefully about the validity of your long-held objections to this idea and that you consider with great care the positive possibilities that this vehicle offers. In the end view of this scene, the stakes are high, since they involve the very notion of a profession and that is indeed most dear to all of us claiming membership. Looked at in these ways, it is a case of professionalism being enhanced, not lowered, by the advent of collective bargaining for faculty personnel.

Lester B. Strickler
Professor, Business Administration

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining by faculty within the State System of Higher Education became a reality in Oregon on October 15, 1971 when a contract was signed between OSEA representing the academics at Tongue Point and the University of Oregon. All faculty should give serious thought to this action.

Ten years ago the faculty, or at least the chemists, would have said about such collective bargaining: "Not for us." But presently it is evident that bargaining for salaries, fringe benefits, and grievances is becoming imperative. Faculty members are realizing they must rethink their stand when they see the advantages gained by the classified and less-educated employees who require the State System as employer to negotiate with them concerning the necessities of life. In contrast to this classified group, academics are becoming increasingly aware that they themselves are dependent on the generosity and whims of the many levels of administration in the State System as employer, levels which may or not have either the desire or ability to secure the needed salary adjustments and bring benefits for the faculty under them.

"We may be professional scientists or educators but we are amateur negotiators" is the way a Shell chemist put it recently. He continued that "we lacked the economic and professional clout to get things done." This need for solidarity and expertise is being realized also by the students as they negotiate their needs and wishes.

Personally I am glad that faculty organizations through committees are beginning to consider collective bargaining. However, it is also imperative that each of us becomes informed about the needs and process so that we are not naive in our judgment of changes which can so radically affect our life pattern. I do hope that appropriate committee reports and pertinent literature will be made available to all of us for evaluation and personal decision. The Faculty Forum would be an appropriate media for this purpose.

Paul H. Weswig
Agricultural Chemistry
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