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Richard W. Hurd

Cornell University, rwh8@cornell.edu

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Professional Employees and Union Democracy: From Control to Chaos

Abstract

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Section II reviews relevant research on union democracy and the democracy dilemma. Section III looks at attributes of professional workers and the implications for unions that represent them. Section IV summarizes the experiences of the League of Creative Artists, a fictitious name for a real union going through a democracy crisis. The final section offers a brief analysis and suggests possible implications.

Keywords

union democracy, professional employees, unions, labor movement

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Professional Employees and Union Democracy: From Control to Chaos

Richard W. Hurd
Cornell University

I. Introduction

Much of the research on union democracy and almost all of the press coverage focuses on abuses of power at the top of the organization. I look at a case at the opposite end of the democracy spectrum. After an insurgent challenge to an established executive director toppled him from power, the chaos of democracy was unleashed in this small union of professional workers. The turmoil experienced by this organization for most of the past decade demonstrates that the democracy dilemma in unions cannot be successfully resolved by effective use of the democratic process alone and raises tentative questions about the bottom-up, rank-and-file insurgency approach to union transformation.

Section II reviews relevant research on union democracy and the democracy dilemma. Section III looks at attributes of professional workers and the implications for unions that represent them. Section IV summarizes the experiences of the League of Creative Artists, a fictitious name for a real union going through a democracy crisis. The final section offers a brief analysis and suggests possible implications.

II. Union Democracy

There is general agreement among labor relations scholars that union democracy has positive benefits. To some extent support for democracy is based on values — in a democratic society the leaders of an organization that speaks for workers should be selected by those workers both for credibility and because it is right. There also are perceived practical benefits as explained by George Strauss in an overview article, "Union democracy is desirable... because on balance democracy increases union effectiveness in representing members' interests and in mobilizing these members to support its collective bargaining objectives" (Strauss, 1991, p. 201).

While there is broad acceptance of democracy as an ideal, there is also ample evidence that unions share with other bureaucratic organizations a tendency towards oligarchy. At both the national and local levels, the expertise of experienced leaders and staff combines with control over the machinery of the union's operating and communications system to create inertia which perpetuates control by an individual officer, a clique, or even a family. Although oligarchies often are viewed with disdain, a reasonable case can be made that efficient operation, bargaining effectiveness, and political influence are enhanced by concentrated authority and continuity in leadership.

More than half a century ago Herberg identified a "curious paradox" which has come to be known as the democracy dilemma. On the one hand, a labor union is "a businesslike service organization" which represents members' interests in the bargaining and political arenas. On the other hand, a labor union is a "vehicle for democratic self determination" (Herberg, 1943, pp. 405-6). The first role is filled best by a tightly controlled operation, consistent with oligarchy. The second role cries out for a participatory process akin to town meeting democracy. Herberg believes that oligarchy wins out in most unions with the complicity of the members: "By and large, the members are quite satisfied to have it so — as long as things go well and they receive... proper service and protection" (Herberg, 1943, p. 411).

As unions' role as "a businesslike service organization" has expanded over time, so has the involvement of staff in decision making especially at the national level. In many unions, key staff (other than those in specialized roles such as accounting, research, or legal affairs) are former rank-and-file members and local union leaders. It is not uncommon for these home-grown experts in bargaining, arbitration, organizing, or union administration to spend many years on staff influencing policy, only to move later into an elected national office where they set policy. In other unions which restrict office holding to members, a powerful leader may arrange for a trusted aide or relative to work in a union shop temporarily in order to qualify for a run at elective office.

Some unions, including HERE, SEIU and UFCW, do away with niceties and simply allow staff to run for office at all levels. It is not unusual for local presidents or national officers in these unions to be career union staffers who have never worked in the occupation or industry. This does not necessarily undermine democracy so long as the former staff members assume office only after an open and fair election. The point is that the tendency towards oligarchy is reinforced by the increased size of the bureaucracy and by the election of career union bureaucrats to leadership positions.

There is a real temptation to equate union oligarchies with conservative business unionism, and especially with its insurance agent or servicing model orientation. However, this misconstrues the reality that unions controlled at the top can be either right wing or left wing, as Fraser (1998) effectively demonstrates. He weaves an explanation which posits union power as the central ingredient to progressive change and suggests that some highly respected tacticians in the organizing arena consider democracy "a hindrance where a state of undeclared war against employers demands discipline, secrecy and decisive action" (Fraser, 1998, p.38).

Fraser accepts the necessity of foregoing democracy in pursuit of an organizing offensive which is the essential core of labor's revival. Others who share Fraser's dream of a transformed, more militant, and leftist movement disagree with his conclusion. Aronowitz argues that Fraser is simply wrong because "unions are best able to wage class warfare when the rank and file has sovereign control over its basic decisions" (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 84). Similarly, Eisenscher contends that democracy is crucial to transformation: "The engine of labor renewal is the creation of a movement for democratic participation by union members" (Eisenscher, 1999, p. 228).

The debate around union democracy has been rejoined only recently, particularly in reaction to the ascension of John Sweeney to the presidency of the AFL-CIO (Moody, 1998) and to the court removal of Ron Carey as president of the Teamsters (Beizer and Hurd, 1999). A foray into historical literature on the subject sheds some light and helps decipher some of the conflicting messages about democracy emanating both from academia and from the labor movement itself.

In a 1978 book, Hemingway presents a detailed look at three British unions and offers compelling evidence that democracy is indeed a dilemma. Electoral challenges, caucuses, and organized opposition may be evidence of vibrant democracy, but they also introduce political conflict into the life of the union. In practice, then, the dilemma is not simply a choice between oligarchy and grassroots democracy. It is also a choice between control and conflict which are "opposite sides of the same coin." And electoral conflict does not go away after the votes are counted: "either side may subsequently make fresh challenges as issues and resources change . . . the coin can be spun again and again" (Hemingway, 1978, pp. 11-12).

This conclusion does not lead Hemingway to oppose rank-and-file democracy. Rather, he simply confirms that there are no easy answers: "How are we to choose between leaders who emphasize efficient organization at the risk of losing freedom to differ, and members who demand more control from below at the risk of fragmentation and disunity? . . . The [union] governmental process is more complex and problematic than we are lead to believe by the theorists" (Hemingway, 1978, p. 176).

Tannenbaum and Kahn (1958) study the practice of democracy in local unions in the U.S. and focus on the level of control exercised over the internal operations of the union. Four prototypes are described: autocratic (high control at the top), democratic (high control among members), polyarchic (high control at all levels), and anarchistic (low control at all levels). There is a direct relationship between the total amount of control exercised within a local and its power relative to the external environment: "A lot of control in a weak organization may not be nearly so satisfying as a little control in a strong organization" (Tannenbaum and Kahn, 1958, p. 179).

Interestingly, member activism is high in those organizations with high levels of control whether it is exercised by leaders (autocratic), by members (democratic), or is shared (polyarchic). This is reasonable, especially since internal control and external power seem to be closely aligned. And this fits with Herberg's observation noted earlier that members accept oligarchy so long as the union performs its representational functions effectively. Tannenbaum and Kahn conclude, "In the typical evaluation of democracy in [labor] organizations great emphasis is placed on the distribution of control and all too little on the total amount of control exercised" (1958, p. 237).

The purpose of this section has been not to resolve the democracy dilemma, but rather to explore its complexity. As unions struggle with the challenges of transformation, they also confront the limitations of their own internal political cultures. Some unions are controlled by elected leaders, others are effectively run by staff, and others are reasonably democratic. Some unions exhibit relatively high levels of member activism, while in others members are apathetic. The question of whether democratic unions are more effective than oligarchic ones has no straightforward answer, nor does the question of

the most appropriate form to pave the way for revitalization. As we turn to a discussion of the practice of democracy in unions of professional workers, keep in mind the range of issues this entails, I return to the concepts covered in this section when I analyze the case study later in the paper.

III. Professional Workers, Unions, and Democracy

Professional workers' attitudes towards unions are ambivalent. There is a degree of elitism among professionals who take great pride in their abilities, intelligence, and accomplishments. There is a related tendency to look askance at unions as institutions better suited to the gritty world of blue-collar and low-wage service work. At the same time professional workers who feel that they are not given the respect that they deserve are self-confident enough to stand up and demand redress. Frequently, especially where there is a collection of professionals in the same workplace, this involves joining together in an association or a union. Professionals with no particular complaint may also join together with their peers and form organizations in order to network and to advance their careers.

The net result is that professionals are slightly more likely than average to belong to unions, with 19.5 percent density in 1998; in fact with 3.4 million members, the absolute number of professionals in unions exceeds any other broad occupational group (Hirsch and Macpherson, 1999, p. 54). The figures are a bit misleading, however, since about 70 percent of these union members are teachers, and most other concentrations of professional unionization are in public sector occupations such as social workers and librarians (*Ibid.*, pp. 54-6). There are some private sector professions with notable union activity such as those in entertainment, healthcare, and sports. There are also several technical occupations in transportation with established unions including pilots and air traffic controllers.

The equivocal stance of professional workers towards unions plays itself out internally. For example, at an annual leadership training institute for the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT, an AFT affiliate) a colleague and I conduct a half-day session on strategic planning. In an exercise on stakeholders, values, and mission a split inevitably develops between those who believe that NYSUT's attention should be on terms and conditions of employment and those who place priority on the educational process and the children. This struggle to reconcile union priorities with professional objectives is typical.

The problem escalates when professionals are represented by unions with occupationally diverse membership. Local 1199WV, a healthcare union affiliated with SEIU, has a national reputation as a progressive organizing union. Its largest unit is composed of professional nurses employed by the state of Ohio. This unit isolates itself from the rest of the local, most of whom are nurses aides, kitchen workers, and other support staff. The nurses are reluctant to endorse the union's organizing priority and feel that they should be treated professionally, for example demanding a lawyer to represent them at negotiations (an anathema in 1199WV) (Hettrick, 1995).

Professionals in unions also have an unusually strong belief that problems can be resolved to their benefit if only the correct argument can be concocted. They are confident in their own reasoning power, which is a plus in that they are likely to be personally involved in preparation of grievances, but

which can also be a negative if they question every decision made by union leaders or staff. SEIU Local 509 represents nearly 10,000 Massachusetts education and social service professional employees. At one point in the early 1990's, there were 2,500 outstanding grievances and a five-year period from filing to arbitration. Although the backlog was subsequently reduced by a union screening process, the members continued to be "very demanding of staff" (Donnelly, 1995) and "extremely litigious . . . filing grievances about everything" (Casey, 1995).

The attitudes of professional workers towards their jobs and employee organizations provide important background information which helps to understand feelings about democracy. In a 1997 survey conducted under the auspices of Cornell University and sponsored in part by the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees, 1,376 professional and technical workers answered 95 questions each. The interviewees were randomly selected from seven large units which had recently experienced union and management influences during a contested organizing campaign. The seven campaigns included two election losses, two union pull backs before a vote, two election wins prior to the interviews, and one election win after the interviews.

The professionals surveyed displayed strong commitment to their work, with 73 percent who had been employed in the occupation for 10 years or more and 74 percent who anticipated remaining in the occupation at least five years in the future. Job satisfaction was very high at 83 percent, and the top reason for the satisfaction was the type of work performed. When asked to identify the work-related issue of highest importance, freedom to exercise professional judgment was the first choice with staffing issues, procedures to assure fair treatment, and four other choices far behind. When asked what type of group activities in which they would participate to address work-related concerns, the top choice (at 90 percent) was meeting with management to discuss policies. The most widely accepted reason for joining a union or other employee organization was to give workers a voice. The picture that emerges of these professional workers in the aftermath of a union organizing campaign is quite consistent with the posture taken by their unionized peers — they are committed to their professions, confident in their own judgement, and interested in having direct influence on decisions which affect them (Hurd, 1998).

The effect of these attitudes on union democracy is divergent. The commitment to the occupation, the job, and the mission of the work itself draws professionals away from their unions. Their self confidence and desire to participate in decisions that affect them pull them into the apparatus of their unions. Both structure and process are influenced.

In terms of structure, there is often a clear demarcation between elected leaders and staff. Because of the members' strong ties to their work, most of these unions employ full-time staff to conduct union business. Although staff members may have experience in the profession, they are at least as likely to be hired for their expertise in labor relations, union administration, or organizing. Staff are considered to be employees, though, and are not the key decision makers. Elected leaders must be members and often return to the profession after a term in office. Elected leaders control decision making and have authority over staff. This authority is often delegated, at least in part, to a staff director who reports to the union president and executive board.

Because of the reluctance of professional workers to cede decision-making authority to union staff, there is a built-in check which forestalls the oligarchic tendency. Nonetheless, oligarchies do evolve as is the case with the AFT. This union has its strength primarily in unionized states, especially in large cities. The members confront large educational bureaucracies and the desire for union representation tends to outweigh interest in professional concerns. Thus the national union has entrenched leaders, allowing for smooth succession at the top. In 1997 when Al Shanker died, his protégé Sandra Feldman succeeded him. Subsequently, Feldman picked her long-time assistant Randi Weingarten to fill her shoes as head of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, the national union's largest affiliate. True to form, Weingarten was a staff lawyer, not a teacher, whose route to elective office was paved (with Feldman's help) by a brief mid-career stint as a social studies teacher in Brooklyn (Hartocollis, 1998).

In contrast, the NEA is a more typical professional workers' union and, as is often the case, actually began as a professional association focused exclusively on career issues. Although, like the AFT, it has a large staff bureaucracy, the decision-making authority is retained by the members. National officers have term limits, voting at annual representative assemblies is by secret ballot, and much of the work at the state and local level is conducted by volunteers. In fact the contrast in democratic cultures was central to the defeat of the proposed merger between the two organizations in 1998.

The choreographed AFT merger convention voted nearly unanimously in favor of merger (a standard display of oligarchic democracy), but the NEA convention was a raucous affair where momentum for rejection seemed to develop on its own. With only 42 percent supporting merger (66.7 percent was required for passage) the defeat demonstrated clearly that the NEA delegates were not shy in ignoring the advice of their national leaders. In an articulate analysis Pizzigati points to concerns about democratic process, as delegates argued that the new organization would operate more like the AFT than the NEA, pointing specifically to the absence of term limits for officers and the betrayal of "the NEA's secret ballot heritage." The opposing pulls of professionalism and unionism also played a role, as explained by one delegate who was concerned that the merger would signal "that we are more worried about pay and other teacher-centered issues than creating a better educational environment for our children" (Pizzigati, 1998, p. 17).

Although the NEA retains a commitment to democratic form, it is an exercise in representative rather than grassroots democracy. Smaller unions of professional and technical workers sometimes embody the ideal of rank-and-file control. Perhaps the best example is PATCO, where a rebellion by a dissident group known as "choirboys" booted President John Leyden from office and replaced him with Robert Poli a year before the ill-fated 1981 strike. The choirboys implemented an internal organizing plan which raised membership to 90 percent in the open-shop federal section. Although the 11,000 members were scattered across the country in over 400 facilities, solidarity was cultivated by organizing the units into 73 clusters and establishing seven committees in each cluster devoted principally to strike preparation. The level of involvement in the union and the depth of activist democracy was remarkable. These professional air traffic controllers were absolutely confident that their strategy and organizational strength assured a victory in negotiations with the Federal Aviation Administration. The strike failed not because of internal weakness but because the external environment limited the union's power. The

activists' inability to handle effectively the challenges of coordination with other unions, public relations, and political action (PATCO had endorsed Ronald Reagan) resulted in defeat (Hurd, 1986).

The purpose of reviewing briefly the AFT, NEA, and PATCO cases is twofold. First, there is a broad range of experience among professional unions regarding democratic form, ranging from oligarchy to grassroots democracy. Second, the cases of NEA and especially PATCO demonstrate that professional union democracy clearly interferes with union leaders' ability to set the direction of the union, and as in PATCO's case, the results may be disastrous. Although democracy may be a desirable ideal, the reality can be complex as the case to which I now turn demonstrates.

IV. Insurgency at the League of Creative Artists

My case is a U.S. union representing professional workers. Because the issues addressed are confidential and some of the interpretation is qualitative, the organization's name and detailed circumstances have been modified to preserve anonymity. The union is small relative to national organizations but larger than many multi-unit locals. It is affiliated with a much larger union but retains budgetary and strategic autonomy and governs its own affairs.

The League of Creative Artists (LCA) has 6,000 members in 10 dispersed urban centers. Forty percent of the members reside in Rongovia, where the central office is located. The union has collective bargaining agreements with 90 different employers, with an average shop size of about 50. The professionals who belong to the LCA include those currently active in the field (about two-thirds of the members), but also a large number who aspire to employment in the profession, who are retired, or who are temporarily employed in an unrelated occupation. In other words, the LCA in essence is both a union and a professional association.

Among the working members are five different professional categories (with share of membership in parentheses): lead artisans (30 percent), ensemble artisans (45 percent), lead performers (5 percent), ensemble performers (15 percent), and designers (5 percent). Although there are exceptions, the typical bargaining unit includes either lead and ensemble artisans, or lead and ensemble performers; designers may or may not be in either type of unit. The ensemble members and designers are usually long-term employees of a given company, but the leads travel and work on a contingency basis. The LCA negotiates typical agreements for ensemble members and designers, although the terms vary dramatically across urban areas and even from company to company. The contracts for leads set minimum terms and conditions with details negotiated by agents certified by LCA who represent the individual lead and work for a commission.

The union's governing board, called the Assembly, is very large with 150 members; seats are assigned proportionately to the 10 urban centers and the five occupational groups. There are six officers — a president, three vice presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer. Each of the 10 urban centers has its own local board chair, and each of the 90 shops has a steward. All of the positions are elected, and all are filled by unpaid volunteers. The paid staff are officially hired by the Assembly. There are an Executive Director, five field representatives who bargain and handle grievances, five contract enforcers who monitor collective and individual contracts and enforce union security provisions (including dues

collection), one assistant to the elected officers, and five other office workers. Nearly half of the staff have some personal tie to one of the professions the union represents.

Once considered an important force in the industry, the union's power took a big hit in the early 1980s when the Reagan administration dramatically cut funding for the arts. Although the industry has rebounded over time, and the unions representing other workers at the same employers seem to have recouped their losses, LCA is still struggling. This is in part due to a fairly large pool of similarly skilled (though less experienced) professionals that has fed an expansion in market share for nonunion employers. Lethargy inside of the union is also blamed, especially by activist members.

In spite of the change in the external environment in the 1980s and the attendant loss of power, LCA leaders and Staffellung to long-established routines. The president and most other officers were essentially figure-heads; although the names and faces changed over time, many were lead artisans near the end of their careers or retired. The Assembly did little more than discuss and approve actions of the staff. All Assembly meetings were held in Rongovia, effectively disenfranchising sixty percent of the delegates since their travel was not reimbursed. Most of the delegates who lived in Rongovia seemed more interested in LCA as a professional association than as a union, and Assembly meetings were effectively social gatherings.

The Executive Director and the five field representatives conducted most of the union's work. They established cordial relations with management and were deferential at the negotiating table. There was a tendency to accept at face value reports from employers of financial constraints, and there was a policy of flexibility to adjust bargaining demands to the circumstances of individual companies. The contract enforcers relied on antiquated methods to track compliance and were seldom in a position to question with confidence the employer's dues deduction practices. It was common knowledge that lead artisans and performers could avoid paying dues with impunity, and many in effect became free riders. Toward the end of the 1980s as the labor movement's attention to organizing increased, unions with similar membership began to encroach on LCA's jurisdiction. The union's budget was in crisis, and rumors circulated that the Executive Director had an extravagant expense account.

By 1990 antipathy replaced apathy among a subset of members who wanted LCA to attend more effectively to its role as a union and take a more aggressive stance in negotiations. Ensemble artisans and performers at several companies in Rongovia organized themselves and assumed control of their own negotiations, collecting what amounted to local dues to hire a labor lawyer to replace the LCA field representative at the table. In three of the urban centers, where the bulk of members worked for only two or three employers, the local board assumed more responsibility and also began to act independently from the union's central office.

At about the same time an informal insurgent group of activists began to network. Disenfranchised delegates from outside of Rongovia joined with dissatisfied members in Rongovia to push for staff accountability, increased militance, improved contracts, and more effective enforcement. To quell the disturbance the Executive Director agreed to fund occasional meetings of the Assembly via conference call with a speaker phone hookup in each of the 10 urban centers. The insurgents, though a

minority, organized themselves (paying huge phone bills in the process out of their own pockets) and seized control.

The insurgent controlled Assembly established a Staff Relations Committee, which in 1992 dismissed the Executive Director and searched for a replacement. A lawyer who had worked with one on the LCA's urban center boards outside of Rongovia was hired. In the first several months he fired two field representatives and hired a new director for the contract enforcement department. In the meantime, the insurgents persuaded the Assembly to establish an Executive Committee which was filled primarily with the architects of the coup.

The insurgents had used the democratic process skillfully to gain control of LCA and remained committed to open discussion and a republican format. Seven years later the Assembly meets every three weeks via conference call. Issues are debated, referred to committee, and debated again. Meetings often last in excess of three hours. Standard attendance is about half of the 150 delegates. The Assembly makes all key decisions and must approve all actions of the Executive Committee. Even all collective bargaining agreements must receive approval of the Assembly before going into effect, which sometimes delays implementation by weeks or months so that questions raised by individual delegates can be resolved.

Because the delegates often serve on Assembly committees and also as stewards for their own shops and on the union's urban center boards, the time commitment of the volunteers is extensive. Executive Committee members may devote 40 hours of their own time each week to LCA matters, and many of the more active delegates spend 20 hours or more. Not surprisingly there is a high level of burnout and turnover.

Under the new Executive Director there were initially immediate improvements in the functioning of the central office. He stabilized the budget by adopting austerity measures, including re-negotiation of the office lease and a three-year freeze on staff pay. The new director of the contract enforcement group computerized the tracking and dues-collection system and brought in an entirely new, computer-literate staff. Although difficulties remain, dues collection improved substantially.

The new Executive Director also assumed leadership of negotiations and adopted a hard-line posture at the table. Because no action was taken to increase the union's strength (no external organizing, no contract campaigns, no coalition building, no internal organizing) the result was longer, more contentious negotiations with little payoff in the form of contract improvements. With 90 contracts and only five field representatives, a negotiating backlog developed. Now nearly all contracts are extended beyond expiration (perpetuating weak terms and language) simply because staff cannot catch up.

The Assembly and, especially, its Executive Committee have been determined to increase staff accountability. Their attention has been exclusively on staff failures and weaknesses in central office operations (successes and good performance pass with little notice). They have taken a hard line with the Executive Director, and he has in turn adopted an autocratic style. Poor performance in the contract enforcement department and among support staff is routinely dealt with by immediate dismissal.

Because of the incredible backlog in negotiations, after the initial removal of two field representatives the others escaped the axe, though not the wrath of the Executive Committee.

The failure of all the changes to improve terms and conditions of employment frustrates the elected leaders and the members. They blame the negotiating skills of the Executive Director and the field representatives rather than the LCA's lack of power. To address the problem the Assembly has established a Bargaining Committee to work with the field representatives. Although the new committee has provided useful input from members for key negotiations, it also has added another forum where issues can be raised, which has muddied the union's bargaining strategy and further slowed the process.

For its part, the Executive Committee has decided that if it wants matters handled appropriately, then it must issue commands to the Executive Director, and even to individual field representatives. Although this is sometimes done after a vote of the committee, its individual members also give specific orders to staff. This practice has extended to the work of the contract enforcement department as well, usually through its director.

With an autocratic Executive Director and an intrusive Executive Committee, it is not surprising that staff morale is low and turnover is high. This has helped LCA weed out poor performers, but productive employees have left as well. When two field representatives recently quit in frustration, the Staff Relations Committee (after agonizingly lengthy searches conducted with attention to democratic process) hired experienced professionals with the potential to help turn the union around.

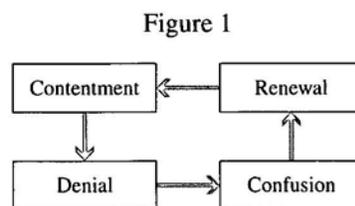
One of the two was placed in a position as head negotiator by the Executive Committee after it recognized her strategic skills. However, the committee insisted on giving instructions, requiring reports on minute decisions and developments at negotiations, and setting strategic direction. The new head negotiator had to shelve plans to focus on ways to increase power through internal and external organizing because she was issued a decree to concentrate on reducing the negotiating backlog, in part by spending more time at the table herself. Combined with the Executive Director's efforts to assert his own authority over bargaining, this obtrusive meddling was more than this promising head negotiator could tolerate and in consternation she left after only six months.

As of May 1, 1999, the situation at LCA is bleak. The Executive Director refuses to make an independent decision for fear that the Executive Committee will simply overrule him. The field representatives are stretched thin and at a loss of what to do, especially with the departure of the promising head negotiator. Other members of the staff are extremely unhappy, and the most productive ones are looking for new jobs elsewhere. A shop of performers in Rongovia decertified LCA and went independent; a shop of ensemble artisans in Rongovia would like to decertify, but have not yet been able to navigate the legal process to accomplish the task. The two shops are among the LCA's largest and highest paid. Two urban center boards outside of Rongovia (accounting for about 10 percent of the total working members) are well organized, effective at the local level, and totally disenchanted with the central office, the Assembly, and the Executive Committee. A group of lead artisans and performers which established its own Assembly committee a few years ago have given up; nearly half of

the seats in the Assembly reserved for leads are vacant. The elected officers have lost confidence in the Executive Director, the field representatives, and other key staff. Staff at all levels complain of micro-managing by delegates and the assumption of failure. In short, LCA is fractured in many directions. The promise of the democratic takeover of the union is all but forgotten, and the state of confusion has produced a loss of hope among members.

V. Analysis

The process of organizational change usually goes through four stages, as depicted in Figure 1 (Janssen, 1982).



The first stage is contentment, where the participants in the organization are satisfied with its role and performance. This would accurately describe LCA in the period prior to 1980. The second stage is denial, where the participants cling to old methods of operation, even though the environment has changed and new strategies are needed. This characterizes LCA in the 1980s. Because it is very difficult to break away from established institutional procedures, any effort to transform the organization will be met with resistance and the stage of confusion will have to be survived. For nearly 10 years LCA has been stuck in this stage. With an appropriate vision and strategic plan, the renewal stage is possible and the cycle is complete. At this writing, there is no consensus within LCA regarding an appropriate vision, and the elected leaders' survival mentality has precluded the development of any strategic plan to escape the union's dysfunctional morass.

Although the unfortunate state of LCA presents an intriguing challenge for those promoting labor union transformation, my focus is on union democracy. The case demonstrates clearly the characteristics of professional workers reviewed in Section II. In effect LCA has played the role of both professional association and union. Efforts by activists to prod the organization to become more effective as a union have been frustrating at best. This in part can be explained by the insurgents' mistaken belief that democratic process and their own desires would be enough to accomplish the task.

Professional workers' belief in reasoned discourse and democratic process have not served LCA well, as the unwieldy Assembly is responsible for many decisions its members are ill equipped to make. Furthermore, the willingness of the Executive Committee to tackle day-to-day operational decisions (consistent with the broader inclinations of professionals) has interfered with the union's operational efficiency and potential success. There seems to be a strong self-confidence in their own analytical powers which drives members of the Executive Committee to second guess virtually every decision

made by the paid staff. Even if the staff professionals all are incompetent (which is not the case), the constant intrusion cannot possibly help them to reach their potential.

In terms of union democracy itself. Section II explores various perspectives on the democracy dilemma. At one extreme we have oligarchy, later exemplified by the AFT's efficiency and top-down control of the decision-making process. At the other extreme we have democracy, but there really are at least two versions. One is representative democracy with a parallel supporting staff bureaucracy such as the NEA. The other is rank-and-file democracy where the staff is subservient. Both PATCO and LCA fit this model.

However, to understand the experience of rank-and-file democracy, we must also look at the issue of control, both internal and external. PATCO's choirboys established an impressive internal control system, convinced the members of its efficacy, and won their active involvement. LCA's insurgents, on the other hand, were so focused on democratic process that they bypassed the type of solidaristic internal organizing displayed by PATCO. Both organizations totally misjudged the situation regarding external control or power. The choirboys overestimated the potential power of their strike and in effect self destructed. The LCA insurgents convinced themselves that power could be secured simply by cracking down on staff and adopting tough stances at the bargaining table.

The LCA's lack of power explains why most members have simply bowed out. Yes, there is democratic control, but to what end if the union is weak? What grassroots democracy has brought to LCA (in the absence of power) is conflict, internal fragmentation, and disunity. And as Hemingway suggested, the coin of conflict is being spun again and again. The case even shows signs of devolving into Tannenbaum and Kahn's archetype of union democracy where there is low control at all levels, appropriately named *anarchy*.

Although democracy cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to union transformation based on one case, the LCA experience demonstrates by negation how desirable efficient operation of the union's administrative function might be; it also illustrates how, when carried to an extreme, democratic participation by elected volunteers can destroy potential. Perhaps most crucially we can see the importance of strategic perspective. The LCA insurgents (just like the PATCO choirboys) overestimated the union's potential power based on partial analysis of the challenges confronting it. Without a clear vision of where LCA wanted to go, and a plan to strengthen the commitment of members to the union internally and to spread the union's reach by organizing externally, this experiment with union democracy was preordained to fail.

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