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ARTICLE

“Sterilizing and Fertilizing the Plant at the Same Time”: The Class Formation of the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association

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Abstract
This article analyzes class formation of the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association (MTEA). In 2011, Wisconsin curtailed public-sector union collective bargaining, causing Wisconsin unions’ membership and political power to plummet. This article puts the 2011 collapse into historical perspective, by considering the development of Milwaukee teachers’ labor organizing over the course of the twentieth century. In part I, I chronicle the formation of the MTEA, including its early contest with the Milwaukee Teachers Union (MTU) and the gendered fault lines of the teachers’ collective vision. In part II, I discuss the consequences of teachers’ rhetorical contradictions, especially their lack of collaboration with the civil rights movement in Milwaukee. This article challenges the notion that class movements are preordained with unified interests and aims, and instead shows that unions themselves build and assemble people’s political ideas, either to expand solidarity or to narrow it.

Keywords: class formation; labor unions; teachers’ unions; Wisconsin

In 2011, Wisconsin—the first state to grant public-sector workers collective bargaining rights in 1959—dramatically curtailed public-sector union collective bargaining, causing Wisconsin unions’ membership and political power to plummet.[1] This article puts the 2011 collapse into historical perspective, considering how gender and racial fault lines constituted an important dimension of educators’ class formation.

To be sure, many of the tensions embedded in the origins of the Milwaukee teachers’ union were fairly common. As in many other cities, the Milwaukee teachers’ union formed amid the civil rights movement’s work to address segregated schools.[2]

[1]Dave Umhoefer, “For Unions in Wisconsin, a Fast and Hard Fall since Act 10,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Oct. 9, 2016, https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2016/11/27/for-unions-in-wisconsin-fast-and-hard-fall-since-act-10.html.

[2]For example, see Jon Shelton, Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Jerald E. Podair, The Strike That Changed

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As in many other cities, in Milwaukee teachers divided themselves between the labor-affiliated American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the professional association, the National Education Association (NEA).[3] Between 1961 and 1965, the NEA and the AFT competed in forty different elections across the country. While the NEA won twenty-six elections to the AFT's sixteen, the AFT gained far more teachers who could go to the bargaining table—seventy-six thousand to the NEA's twenty-one thousand. Across the country, the AFT won by aligning itself with the labor movement and by emphasizing its support of civil rights.[4] But in Milwaukee, the opposite occurred. Milwaukee, in this regard, was anomalous; it was one of the few large cities in which cities had collective bargaining rights yet nonetheless chose the NEA affiliate instead of the AFT affiliate. This is particularly surprising given Milwaukee's strong labor history. Teachers in Detroit, also a city with strong labor movements, overwhelmingly voted to affiliate with the AFT, just weeks after Milwaukee's vote.[5] But in Milwaukee, a labor town, labor lost. Why and with what consequences?

Both a process and an outcome, class formation refers to how collectively organized social groups—workers, neighbors, parents, immigrants, etc.—cohere in order to articulate and pursue their class interests. Class formation illuminates both the merging and interaction of class structures. It reveals the hard boundaries of economic world order on the one hand, and class practices—individuals' choices, disposition, and rhetoric on the other.[6] As historian E. P. Thompson theorizes, class formation arises at "the intersection of determination and self-activity," a blending of structures, ways of life, dispositions, and collective action. It focuses on moments of class struggle, in which collective groups engage in antagonistic class practices against each other.[7] Class struggles, observes sociologist Erik Olin Wright, transform class formations.[8]

Although historians have authored vibrant accounts of teachers' unions' antagonistic struggles, more commonly teachers' unions are historicized as racialized actors—White teachers versus communities of color. Yet, these accounts of racialized conflicts sidestep a class analysis of the conflict, as if class and race were two separate problems rather than fundamentally intertwined. Many scholarly accounts take the clashes between Black communities and unionized teachers as the *conclusion* of the research

New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Jonna Perrillo, Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Daniel H. Perlstein, Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

[3]Steve Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907–81* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Jesse Chanin, "Civil Rights, Labor Conflict, and Integration: New Orleans Educators' Struggle for Collective Bargaining 1965-1974," *Labor Studies Journal* 46, no. 3 (2021), 286-317.

[4]Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 227-28.

[5]Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System, Detroit, 1907–81*.

[6]Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3–41.

[7]E. P. Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory," in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 299.

[8]Erik Olin Wright, "A General Framework for Studying Class Consciousness and Class Formation," in *Class Counts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 373–406.

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rather than the *preempting question*. Historian Jerry Podair, for example, characterizes the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers' strike as a conflict between "Black" and "White" values.[9] Other analyses of that same strike have considered the conflict as a division between teachers' rights and interests on the one hand, and students' rights and interests on the other, or a conflict between professionals and community groups.[10] Yet how did these positions form to begin with? If professionalism is used to racially divide White teachers from Black community members, how did teachers come to that particular framing of their class identity? What other options could have been available? What have been the historical consequences of these choices?

This article contributes to the study of teachers' unions by drawing in both the macro-economic structures that shaped educators' decision to form associations, *alongside* the micro-dispositions and practices of educators within particular formations that, in turn, shaped economic structures—attending to racial, class, and gender dynamics along the way. My aim is not to show that educators either did or did not have a class analysis, much less the "correct" one, but rather to query the terms and content of their particular class formation. This analysis contributes to the vein of teacher union scholarship that considers teachers' unions as political and economic actors.[11] As Richard Quantz has highlighted, few studies of teacher unionism take teachers' own perceptions and subjective understandings as valid, much less determinant, components of history.[12] Heeding Quantz's observation, my work aims to add texture to the study of teachers' decision to unionize (or not), as well as to connect teachers' decisions with the structural and economic conditions that also shape educators' lives. The question at the heart of this research is, how did teachers come to see themselves as they did, and how did their view of themselves determine what they did?

By probing the particular class formation of Milwaukee teachers, I aim to challenge the notion that class movements are preordained with interests and aims, as if all people with the same employer have a unified diagnosis of inequality and injustice, and a unified prognosis for their amelioration. The indeterminacy of class formation itself is determined by the structure of class relations—many positions in the class structure are defined by contradictory relations. The fact that teachers are wage earners may incentivize a certain set of practices; the fact that they are also public servants, professionals, and so on may incentivize a different and incompatible set of practices. This historical role of the teachers' organization is cut out by the structure itself, so to speak.

Therefore, this article posits that unions themselves build and assemble people's political ideas, which then can be exercised into action or adopted as collective

[9]Jerald E. Podair, "'White' Values, 'Black' Values: The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Controversy and New York City Culture, 1965–1975," *Radical History Review* 59 (Spring 1994), 36-59; Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*.

[10]Diana D. Amico, "Teachers' Rights versus Students' Rights: Race and Professional Authority in the New York City Public Schools, 1960–1986," *American Educational Research Journal* 53, no. 3 (2016), 541–72; Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights*.

[11]Shelton, *Teacher Strike!*; Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*; Wayne Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1982).

[12]Richard Quantz, "The Complex Visions of Female Teachers and the Failure of Unionization in the 1930s," *History of Education Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Winter, 1985), 439-58.

identity.[13] As Jack Dougherty notes in his pivotal study of civil rights organizing in Milwaukee public schools, Black activists' struggle for educational justice was hardly monolithic or universal—there was, in his poetic phrasing, "more than one struggle."[14] This article aims to do similarly for teachers' unions. It traces the multiple projects with diverging aims that have pressed into Wisconsin's largest public-sector union. The point of illustrating labor's multiple tendencies is not merely to marvel at the wonders of plurality, but rather to more accurately depict the composition of the balance of forces that guided the historical motors of change.

I craft my article in two main parts. In part I, I trace the development of the MTEA as a contest between two different teacher groups: the MTEA, a professional association, and the MTU, a labor union. The two groups offered different visions of educators' problems as well as their power, and the contest between the two groups provides important insights into the Milwaukee educators' key concerns and strategies. I highlight the MTEA's origins as a professional association, rather than a union, and the particular class and gender politics entrenched in its origins. Second, I discuss the formation of the MTU and its alliance with the national union, the American Federation of Teachers. Third, I review the brief period of dueling between the MTEA and the MTU, and analyze the reasons *why* the MTEA won multiple elections for sole bargaining rights, eventually provoking MTU's dissolution. I suggest that Milwaukee educators' reasons for choosing the MTEA over the MTU became as significant as the choice itself. Zooming in on the contest between two different teacher organizations illuminates the different rhetoric and dispositions that drew teachers toward two different paths to exercise collective worker power.

In part II, I reveal the consequences of teachers' dispositional and rhetorical choices. First, I describe how the MTEA's lack of a robust analysis of the financial crises facing Milwaukee public schools—alongside their commitment to "local control"—weakened its ability to develop either the aim or the muscle necessary to address the budget crisis. Second, I consider how teachers sought to build their power via student discipline policies. These policies closely aligned with the union's rejection of the civil rights movement's activities and contributed to breaking down trust and goodwill between the teachers' union and many Black educational activists. This model of forming class power, I argue, generated contradictions that, in time, would become near-fatal instabilities.

Becoming a Professional Association: The Formation of the MTEA

In Milwaukee, the first organization to address teachers' working conditions was a professional association that intentionally distanced itself from labor unions. For decades, female teachers had experienced inferior pay and working conditions than

[13]Cedric de Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal, eds., *Building Blocs: How Parties Organize Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); De Leon sai, De, and Tuğal, "Political Articulation: The Structured Creativity of Parties," in *Building Blocs*, 1-36; Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41–63.

[14]Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

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their male colleagues.[15] In the fall of 1901, a group of female elementary school teachers formed the Milwaukee Teachers Association (MTA), the predecessor of today's MTEA. Through the MTA, the Milwaukee teachers aimed to augment their professional standing, and especially improve their wages, which were paltry and patchily distributed; teachers' salaries were typically determined one teacher at a time, and often lower than the pay earned by facilities and maintenance workers. Within MTA's first months of existence, city newspapers ran reproachful editorials forecasting that the association would embolden teachers to revolt in an outbreak of strikes. In response, the association quickly issued a public "no-strike" resolution in April 1902, eager to distinguish its intentions and tactics from labor unions.[16]

Indeed, the Milwaukee teachers in the MTA made every effort not to be misconstrued as a teachers' *union*.[17] Labor unions were seen as gruff and gritty groups, fit for men who labored for their living. The ladies of the MTA argued that they were, by contrast, upright and distinguished women of society. They set up their meetings in ways that conspicuously displayed this narrative. Although at the turn of the century, Milwaukee public school buildings were loci of educational and social foment for many—large swaths of Milwaukee's working class crowded into classrooms for community meetings and public lectures on educational and political matters—the teachers' association politely declined the school board's invitation to hold the association's meetings in school buildings, preferring instead to gather in more refined locales.[18] Annually, they held full-dress banquets, often at the upscale Pfister Hotel, and later, in the Hotel Wisconsin, in rooms with grand pianos and Victorian furnishings. To heighten the social and intellectual prestige of their meetings, they mailed handkerchiefs out with membership cards and invited distinguished speakers, such as university presidents and well-known professors, to their meetings to deliver comments on educational issues.[19] They often convened on Saturday mornings to discuss pedagogical matters such as, "Vertical Penmanship—Is It More Desirable Than Our Current System?"[20] Although women teachers' inferior pay and working conditions

[15]For example, in 1892, when the school board deliberated teachers' salaries, a faction of school board directors "strenuously opposed any raises." After "considerable argument," they struck a compromise. They would award raises to a few select teachers. Miss Anna Colman, the director of mathematics, got a salary increase from $1,000 to $1,200. Mr. Herbert M. Woodward, instructor of manual training, received an increase of $1,200 to $1,400. "High School Salaries: Several of Teachers to Get More Pay," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 25, 1892. Note that the newspaper articles cited in this paper came from the clippings held by the Milwaukee History Clippings Index, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, WI. Page numbers are not available in these clippings. In 1853, Wisconsin women teachers earned $9.94 a month, while men took home $18.17, nearly twice as much. Dustin Beilke and Chris Micklos, *Wisconsin Education Association Council: A History* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2001), 12.

[16]Delbert K. Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," Milwaukee, WI, 1990, 4. Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association archives (MTEA), Milwaukee, WI.

[17]The abiding tensions between women's movements and labor organizations are brilliantly examined by Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[18]Robert Lowe, "The New Unionism and the Very Old," *Education Week* 17, no. 29 (April 1998), 46–50.

[19]Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association."

[20]"General City News," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 20, 1894.

necessitated the formation of the MTA, the organization took great pains to cast itself as a genteel associations of ladies, as if it could somehow transcend the gendered oppression and class exploitation that necessitated the group's formation, without actually addressing those forces themselves. Indeed, they relied on gendered tropes to secure their legitimacy.

Yet, it was hard to deny the fact that the teachers' association's mission to improve the status and treatment of teachers, especially their wages and benefits, bore a marked similarity to the mission of labor unions: these teachers hoped to collectively pursue their material interests. The four aims of the association cited by its founding charter—"pensions, salaries, sociability of teachers, and the general promotion of education"—differed only vaguely in tone from charters of teachers' unions.[21] Where the association differed from unions, then, was less in how it pursued its mission, and more in *the optics* of how it pursued its mission. These teachers did not want *to be seen as* a union. This sensibility soaked into their strategy and tactics; the teachers did not see themselves as a union and they did not wish to act like one.[22] When, in 1903, the teachers' association took up a call for a pension, and members supported a proposed bill to establish it, the association's leaders spurned a proposal to organize a mass meeting in support of the bill, fearing it would too closely resemble labor union tactics in its militancy and collective nature. Instead, the association opted to pay half of the legal expenses of the Milwaukee Principals' Association, who had aided in the bill's drafting.

While this strategy paid off in the short run, it undermined the association's prospects for achieving its goals in the long run. Because few members were active in the association's affairs, the association provided a meager threat to the resistant school board, particularly as teachers approached the subject of their pay amid the economic slump of the 1910s. Between 1903 and 1919, the association politely pleaded with the school board for raises. But the board barely managed a response to the petitions, instead shuffling the association's wage proposals from committee to committee, until the proposed revisions became outdated and obsolete to the point of irrelevance. By 1919, when teachers received promissory notes from the local government in lieu of paychecks, the association's pleas to the board devolved from raising wages to simply asking that their salaries be paid "when due."[23]

This manner of communications, if it can be called as much, carried on from the turn of the century to 1920. That year, the teachers' association retained an attorney to help it with its wage campaign.[24] Thanks to the attorney's efforts, the school district finally adopted a minimum salary for teachers. As historian Delbert Clear summarized,

[21]See Urban, *Why Teachers Organized*.

[22]Teachers' rejection of unionism perhaps was not simply a product of their conservatism, but rather represented an attempt to operate strategically within an institution structured to serve the interests of men and administrators, over those of women and teachers. See Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 52.

[23]Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association."

[24]"Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of Directors," Aug. 5, 1919, Board of School Directors of Milwaukee, Proceedings and Minutes of the Board of School Directors and Committees, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison Wisconsin (hereafter cited as Proceedings).

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this victory significantly changed the association's strategies going forward; it would never find itself without the services of an attorney.[25]

While instrumental in the short term, the teachers' association's administrative-legal appeal for recognition from the school board proved insufficient resistance against the oncoming economic depression of the 1930s. The economy's downward spirals triggered an abundance of teachers, as more women were forced into the workforce to offset the labor market contractions in male-dominated sectors.[26] Between 1925 and 1935, the number of teachers in Milwaukee grew by 33 percent, from 1,975 in 1925 to 2,630 in 1935.[27] The abundant labor supply gave the school board the upper hand in crafting teachers' working conditions in two crucial new ways. First, the influx of women into the teaching ranks heightened gender discrimination within the profession. The few male teachers employed during this time were appointed to secondary school positions, where they were paid more than elementary school teachers, positions almost exclusively held by women. In 1932, the school board outright prohibited married women from becoming permanent teachers.[28] Second, the school board forced teachers to accept arbitrary pay reductions. Between 1932 and 1934, the school board cut teachers' salaries 25 percent.[29]

Yet, although the association thoroughly disapproved of the board's measures, it had no means of recourse besides issuing an uncharacteristic reprimand of the school board. Members scolded the board for its obstinacy, angrily warning the directors in a letter that their policies would make it difficult for teachers to "instill in the minds of their pupils respect for law and government, consideration of personal and property rights of others, regard for upright civil conduct and love of honesty and square dealing."[30] Despite the teachers' stern upbraiding, the school board didn't even do as much as publish the teachers' letter in the meeting's proceedings, much less refer it to the deciding committee. Teachers had few options, beyond wringing their hands.

In summary, the association formed in effort to bring greater prestige and pay to the predominantly female Milwaukee teachers. Although the association wanted improved pay for and treatment of its members, it was committed to distinguishing itself from a union in two key ways: its style and its tactics. Association members adopted specific social styles to distinguish its level of prestige from that of other groups (meeting in fancy locales out of schools with prestigious guests presiding over the affairs, for example). Its tactics aimed not to offend the school board—it submitted polite requests to the board, shunned protests and collective actions, and relied heavily on a lawyer to do its bidding. The class location of the teachers as feminized, poorly paid workers limited the class practices adopted by the association, which chose to emphasize

[25] Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 7.

[26] Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 12.

[27] "Superintendent's Monthly Enrollment Summary, October 2, 1925; "Superintendent's Monthly Enrollment Summary, September 30, 1935," in Proceedings.

[28] William J. Kritek and Delbert K. Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, ed. John L. Rury and Frank A. Cassell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

[29] Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 8.

[30] Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools."

members' gentility, femininity, and restraint. Yet these practices had little capacity to influence the teachers' class position, as the economic downturn of the 1930s revealed. The association could offer little protection against the school board's cuts.

Becoming a Labor Union: The Formation of the MTU

Meanwhile, a group of predominantly male teachers developed a different set of practices and disposition to address educators' working conditions. The 1930s saw a boost in labor activity in Milwaukee, as across the country. In mere weeks, thousands of Milwaukee workers newly joined unions in 1933.[31] Workers' new levels of organization also generated a powerful political apparatus. Milwaukee's labor council, the Federated Trades Council (FTC), boasted over thirty thousand members, and its strong organization and activism helped to usher a cadre of socialists to positions in municipal government.[32] Thanks to the efforts of the FTC, the union spirit pervaded schools, too. The FTC not only helped to elect socialists to the school board, but also regularly petitioned the school board to adopt pro-labor positions, pressuring the board to meet janitors' demands for wage raises and to establish itself as an independent tax authority in order to meet wage increases.[33]

In addition to fiscal matters, the FTC took interest in the ideological project of schooling, often weighing in on textbooks, curriculum focus, and educational policy.[34] For example, when a play put on by Milwaukee's North Division High School disparagingly portrayed striking workers, the FTC pressed the school board to prohibit such depictions.[35] The Milwaukee labor council's concerns with public schooling reflected not merely the interests of education workers, but also the labor movement's interests in public education.[36]

Seeking to further strengthen labor's influence in schools, a small but committed faction of Milwaukee teachers decided to form the city's first teachers' union. No doubt roused by the fervor of industrial democracy that buzzed through the trades at the time, a group of male teachers at Boy's Technical School, a vocational school that prepared "mechanically inclined" boys to pursue careers in the trades, formed the city's first teacher's union.[37] On February 11, 1933, twenty-six teachers scrawled their names on a sheet of Wisconsin State Federation of Labor letterhead, petitioning the American

[31] Robert W. Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1984), 49–77.

[32] Darryl Holter, "Sources of CIO Success: The New Deal Years in Milwaukee," *Labor History* 29, no. 2 (1988), 199–224; Stuart Eimer, "From 'Business Unionism' to 'Social Movement Unionism': The Case of the AFL-CIO Milwaukee County Labor Council," *Labor Studies Journal* 24, no. 2 (1999), 63-81; Meta Berger, *A Milwaukee Woman's Life on the Left: The Autobiography of Meta Berger* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2001).

[33] "Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of Directors," June 4, 1918; June 30, 1919, in Proceedings.

[34] Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," 161.

[35] "Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of Directors," Dec. 1919, in Proceedings.

[36] See, for example: Kenneth Teitelbaum, *Schooling for Good Rebels: Socialist Education for Children in the United States, 1900-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

[37] James L. Cox, "Boys' Technical High School of Milwaukee," *Junior High Clearing House (1920-1921)* 1, no. 7 (1920), 13-16.

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Federation of Teachers for a charter of affiliation to become the Milwaukee Teachers Union.[38]

The call to unionize Milwaukee's teachers bore a decidedly gendered character. Whereas the teachers' association had been formed by a group of women teachers, it was a group of men who formed the union. As the trainers of future trade workers, these teachers likely perceived less ideological distance between the schoolhouse and the shop floor than did the women elementary school teachers who had assembled the MTA. What's more, joining a labor federation did not pose a threat to perceived gendered expectations for these men, who likely saw themselves in gendered and professional terms as aligned with the men of labor. The teachers' calls to unionize were rooted not in a desire to raise women's wages but to ensure men entering the profession could secure their status as "bread-winners," thereby fulfilling their own gendered expectations. Between 1920 and 1940, the percentage of men teaching high school in Milwaukee jumped from 31 percent to 48 percent, rising to 58 percent by 1955.[39] As men increasingly entered the work of teaching, they saw unions as a means to raise the pay for historically feminized work that they were now engaging in greater proportions.

Unlikely other AFT-affiliated teacher unions across the country, Milwaukee teachers did not register racial justice as a dimension of their drive to unionize. Whereas AFT affiliates in New York, Newark, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and elsewhere had made overt commitments to racially integrated schools and civil rights, in Milwaukee, the union did not express concern about the city's widespread racial discrimination.[40] Driven by both immediate necessity and national momentum, Milwaukee Black leaders prioritized jobs as the city's fundamental civil rights issue in the 1930s.[41] Hiring Black teachers became a special point of concern; until 1930, the school district had not employed a single Black teacher. Milwaukee's Urban League director, William Kelley, in the late 1930s called on the Milwaukee Board of Directors to hire more Black teachers, which resulted in a compromise agreement that they be placed exclusively at the city's predominantly Black schools. Yet, from the records I have examined, neither the union nor the association had virtually any interaction with the Urban League, seemingly unconcerned with the issue of hiring more Black teachers.[42] The Urban League's

[38]On the basis of the names of the signatories, the teachers were mostly, if not all, men. "We the Undersigned Teachers of Milwaukee" letter to AFT Secretary Treasurer Florence Hanson, Feb. 11, 1933, in Folder 252, Box 26, Series VI, Milwaukee AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Hereafter WPRL.

[39]Men primarily taught in high school, though by 1955, the majority of middle school teachers were men as well. In 1940, only 4 percent of elementary school teachers were men. Cited in Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," 149.

[40]Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 47–55.

[41]Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle*; Jack Dougherty, "'That's When We Were Marching for Jobs': Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee," *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 121–41; Russell Rickford and Marable Manning, "A. Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism," in Marable Manning, *Beyond Boundaries: The Manning Marable Reader*, ed. Russell Rickford (New York: Routledge, 2016), 175-93.

[42]This distinguished MTU from other AFT affiliates elsewhere that pointedly and vocally advocated for racial justice. See Chanin, "Civil Rights, Labor Conflict, and Integration"; Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes*, 40-71; and Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*, 191-92.

strategy did not turn to the teachers' union, either, to advance its demands. As a result, the struggle to address racial justice, particularly in regard to hiring Black teachers, operated independently from the union's functioning.

Despite their lack of concern with either racial justice or gender justice, many Milwaukee teachers still saw joining the labor movement as a project bigger than simply improving their material interests: it was a way to improve public education in political and economic terms. Working with Milwaukee's labor council and the national teachers' union, the AFT, provided the means to do this. In the early 1930s, a slate of radical women had assumed national leadership of the AFT, including Secretary-Treasurer Florence Hanson, who was in frequent touch with Milwaukee teachers. These leaders called on the state to tax corporations in order to fund schools and deepen the democratic organization of schools and unions.[43]

In the union's first monthly meetings in 1933, members quickly encountered their fellow teachers' hesitation at joining a *labor* organization rather than the more familiar professional association. The specific word "union" drew particular concern for many teachers. Yet the secretary-treasurer of the AFT hardly batted an eye at the Milwaukee teachers' questions; their concerns about the connotation of "union" were only too common among the teacher groups Hanson counseled. "I have always advised teachers forming a local to be guided in the choice of a name by local condition," Hanson assured. "[It] is a matter that rests entirely with your membership."[44] Hanson herself, nonetheless, strongly favored the term 'union' and made no apologies for it. "I should like you to consider if it is not part of a teacher's social education to overcome a prejudice against this name and to understand its significance," she encouraged them. "Would a teacher who would stay out of your local because it is a union be a valuable member?"[45] In Hanson's formulation, teachers organize unions—not the other way around. Thus, union strength and energy rests upon the commitments of those who form them—and part of the union's work was to build that energy among the nonbelievers. Sufficiently convinced by Hanson's analysis, the Milwaukee teachers proudly marched ahead as the Milwaukee Teachers' Union.

Thus, in the 1930s, the Milwaukee teacher unionists experienced burgeoning courage in their efforts, bolstered in part by the labor movement around them. As hundreds of workers nationwide led waves of strikes, the Milwaukee teacher unionists took pains to identify "The Teacher's Part in the New Order," to quote the title of an MTU newsletter article.[46] In their monthly newsletters, which ran under the heading "Education in Democracy, Democracy in Education," they exhorted teachers' obligations to "hasten the coming of an economic order of higher social utility." This

[43]Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*; Lois Weiner, "Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley's Vision," *Educational Foundations* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1996), 85-96; Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

[44]Letter from AFT-Secretary Florence Curtis Hanson to Harvey Knoch, MTU Secretary, June 1, 1933, in Folder 252, Box 26, Series VI, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[45]Letter from AFT-Secretary Hanson to Knoch, June 1, 1933.

[46]"The Teacher's Part in a New Order," *MTU Newsletter*, Dec. 1934, in Folder 252, Box 26, Series VI, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

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required teachers' active participation. "Teachers may not remain aloof," the unionists presciently urged in December 1934. "They dare not face the past instead of the future; they must not be satisfied with education which merely reflects the status quo, or worse yet the status quo ante."[47] These early teacher unionists understood they were in the early stages of building something important. "If the past is in our present and the present controls the future," they advised, "we owe it to our profession to make our shadows long, to think things through, and to lead the way for better days."[48]

Yet despite the MTU's lofty ambitions, the strength of its movement and impact was hampered. The union was one of many associations that Milwaukee teachers could join to improve their lot; elementary, junior high, and secondary school teachers each had respective professional organizations. Instead of suturing the teachers together to speak with one voice, the plethora of teacher associations splintered teachers' demands. Each group proposed its own salary schedules and wage demands to the board, thereby allowing the board to pick and choose which elements it would adopt. Perhaps of most consequence, these piecemeal bids disabled teachers from applying unified pressure to change how the school board *levied* funds—not just how they distributed them. For example, in the 1940s, the union and the secondary teachers' association urged the school board to seek authority from the state legislature to levy taxes, while the MTA apologetically shuffled to the school board, asking for raises "inasmuch as revenue sources [would] permit."[49] Without a unified platform of pressure, Milwaukee teachers could not develop sufficient power to change the political and economic conditions surrounding schools. Instead of together demanding a bigger pie, each group of teachers found themselves begging for crumbs. The teachers' class practices limited possibilities for collective action capable of transforming public educators' class position.

This dynamic shifted in the late 1950s, upon the passage of state law recognizing public-sector employees' rights to unionize. Wisconsin teachers played a surprisingly contradictory role in this law. When the public-sector union law passed and included teachers in the category of municipal employees, they become peculiar beneficiaries—gaining protections they had neither organized nor argued for. In fact, as the bill made its way through the legislative halls, the lobbyist for the League of Municipalities, a municipal employers' association, pressed to include teachers in the bill, believing that the mere specter of unionized teachers would induce sufficient odium to kill the entire bill. Therefore, when the bill passed with teachers included, the state teachers' association, the Wisconsin Educational Association, was just as surprised as the League of Municipalities to learn the bill had passed—with teachers included.[50] Teachers received rights for which they had not asked, much less struggled.

[47]"The Union's Stand with Liberal Forces," *MTU Newsletter*, Dec. 1934, in Folder 252, Box 26, Series IV, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[48]"A 'NEW' Journal of Education: 'The Social Frontier,'" *MTU Newsletter*, Dec. 1934, in Folder 252, Box 26, Series VI, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[49]Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 13.

[50]G. M. Saltzman, "A Progressive Experiment: The Evolution of Wisconsin's Collective Bargaining Legislation for Local Government Employees," *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector* 15, no. 1 (1986), 1-25.

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Still, the law no doubt influenced the teachers' union to bolster its organizing. In 1958, the union spearheaded a salary campaign for an across-the-board raise for teachers, $100 higher than the superintendent's proposal. It organized unprecedented turnout to the school board's salary hearings—nearly eight hundred teachers showed up to the school board's Finance Committee meeting. The teachers' demands caught the attention of not only the school board, but also the city's press. The *Milwaukee Journal* remarked with surprise, "Never before has the school board faced such a gathering of teachers."[51] When the board passed the raise, the teachers' union officers and building representatives beamed with pride; their "back-breaking effort and long hours of work" had made a difference.[52]

By 1962, the Milwaukee Teachers' Union was ready to take on the push for collective bargaining. The 1959 state's public-sector employee law had been augmented so that not only were municipal employees legally allowed to unionize, but municipal employers were mandated to bargain with certified unions. This provided a new opportunity for the union. If it could become the exclusive bargaining representative for the Milwaukee teachers, it would no longer have to beg the school board to listen to its demands; it could collectively bargain. In the fall of 1963, the MTU petitioned the Wisconsin Employment Relations Board (WERB) to become the sole representative bargaining unit for teachers throughout the city. Almost immediately, the association, which had previously not shown interest in securing union rights, challenged the union to an election for the bargaining rights. In February 1964, Milwaukee teachers would go to the polls to determine who would become their exclusive bargaining representative, the union or the association.

Though the association had taken little interest in the state's revamped public-sector labor law, it could not ignore the growing drumbeat of the union. In March 1963, the MTA, the group of predominantly elementary school teachers, put aside its decades-old differences with the secondary teachers' association, the male-dominated Milwaukee Secondary Education Association. In an effort to unify the "professionals" against the union, the two groups merged to become the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA), representing secondary teachers and elementary school teachers. When MTEA leaders learned of the MTU's petition to the WERB, they immediately filed an intervention to also appear on the ballot, and set to work campaigning.

Two Visions of Unionism: MTU versus MTEA

For the next six months, the Milwaukee schools buzzed with the question over which group would act as teachers' representatives (see Figure 1.) Many Milwaukee teachers worried their affiliation with labor would undermine their professional and political independence, though it's hard to say what exactly the teachers' adherence to professional independence offered them materially, beyond philosophical commitment to the form. Nonetheless, the association's campaign thus stressed independence for

[51] "500 Teachers Jam Pay Hearing to Protest $250 Raise Proposal," *Milwaukee Journal*, Oct. 2, 1959.

[52] "MTU Spearheads Drive for Salary Increases," *MTU Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (Oct. 1959), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin hereafter WHS).

The Truth Squad
of the MILWAUKEE TEACHERS' UNION

•

BE SURE TO STUDY THE
SAMPLE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING BALLOT

One Organization lists no affiliations

1. If it is affiliated with the NEA, why doesn't it say so?
2. If it is not affiliated with the NEA, why are those outsiders in its office and why are they speaking at meetings?

Please Note . . .

That the Milwaukee Teachers Union is affiliated with American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO. The Union is not ashamed of that affiliation.

Is the other organization secretly dominated?

Is the NEA attempting to dominate Milwaukee Teachers by subterfuge?

Figure 1. MTU flier during 1963 bargaining representative elections.
Photo courtesy of MTU Collection, Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

teachers and freedom from organizations without education ties. "If teachers go union, they will lose autonomy…. The professional association has served teachers. It is not interested in other activities," President Eileen Cantwell warned in October 1963. "But if teachers align with other groups having political and social interests, in spite of yourself you will be drawn into these things."[53] MTEA leaders pointed out that labor affiliation meant higher dues. By contrast, the MTEA's nominal dues "keep officers from being dictatorial [and enable them to] take care of ordinary obligations [of

[53] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963, MTEA archives.

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the] MTEA without any high-powered body to dictate in other matters not related to education."[54]

Beyond raising the issue of political domination, MTEA leaders framed unions as coercive bodies that restricted members' choice to *not* belong to a union. "Follow the line, the history of unions," Cantwell warned MTEA teachers in October 1963. "Where unions have gone and secured negotiating powers, the next step has been a closed shop."[55] For the MTEA, unions not only took away critical political freedoms; they infringed on teachers' professional identity. "Do you want professional policies set aside for labor policies?" Cantwell stressed to her fellow teachers.[56] Echoing Cantwell's refrain, one teacher surmised, "The stakes are high—higher than you realize. It is only a matter of time until the closed shop…. I venture you to say you will not recognize the teaching profession in Milwaukee, and you will be in a different position than you are now."[57]

MTEA teachers' fear of union domination bore traces of the conservative "public choice theory" gathering momentum in the early 1960s.[58] This doctrine took aim at the collective logics embedded in democracy (i.e., majority rule), and sought a means to break unwilling individuals from the yoke of a group. For public choice theorists, freedom was interpreted in its negative sense: freedom *from* government, *from* labor unions, and *from* demands for racial equity. Although MTEA members did not go so far as to demand the state's submission to the market as public choice theorists concluded, their objections to unions echoed public choice theorists' decries against "compulsory unionism."[59] The MTEA did not want to be dragged into "non-teacher" political struggles.[60] As the MTEA membership chairman put it, unions presented "a problem of rights—the right of choice. In a union situation, members have no choice."[61] Freedom of choice for teachers, the membership chairman exhorted forebodingly, meant voting *against* labor organizations and *for* the MTEA.

The MTU, on the other hand, approached the question of political independence more instrumentally. It saw unionization as an effective means to pursue its broader goals of transforming public education. As the assistant to the AFT president reminded MTU leadership, "'Union' means acting in concert, there is no better word. 'Association,' signifies a more reserved, weaker bond. What it gains in dignity, it loses

[54] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

[55] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

[56] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

[57] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

[58] See, Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017); Eleni Schirmer and Michael W. Apple, "(Un)Chaining Democracy: An Essay Review of Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*," *Education Review* 25 (Jan. 2018), 1-13.

[59] Joseph A. McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel, "'Compulsory Unionism': Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-union Idea, 1957-1987," in *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology and Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 226-51.

[60] MTEA made clear its disinterest in "other" activities, such as those addressing the political and economic conditions of schools. As President Cantwell blustered, the professional association "is not interested in other activities. It serves teachers." MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

[61] MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, Oct. 23, 1963.

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in spirit and cohesiveness."[62] The labor affiliation became a point of strength for the MTU.[63] "Please note that the Milwaukee Teachers Union is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO," an MTU flier plainly stated in 1963. "The Union is not ashamed of that affiliation." Instead, the MTU trumpeted the benefits of affiliation, proudly announcing "what a nickel a month" brought to teachers: "The strongest support for federal aid to education, state aid, and local support for better school budgets. The most effective force for social legislation—civil rights, Medicare, improved social security, better tax laws … plus research and many other services."[64]

The question of unionism also triggered concerns about strikes.[65] The MTEA explicitly opposed strikes. Instead, it made a small provision for members to enact "work sanctions" in the advent of unresponsive or hostile negotiations. The MTU, on the other hand, maintained the important role of strikes in securing teachers' power. Yet it had to walk delicately on the issue so as not to provoke additional fears. One way that union leaders attempted to assuage teachers' concerns about strikes was by emphasizing the democratic character of the union. Strikes, like other matters of union business, could only be made by the members of a local—not decreed on high from national leadership. "Walter Reuther, Carl Megel, and [Milwaukee president] Al Siemsen cannot call a strike of teachers. It has to be done by a vote of membership," the AFT president consoled a fretful Milwaukee teacher. As Pete Schnaufer, the AFT's assistant to the president, reminded MTU members, political principles gathered in language, he argued, and formed a power that was not to be abandoned. "You cannot make [political issues] popular by changing the wording," Schnaufer explained, "For example, changing 'integration of pupils' to 'assimilation of ethnically disparate school populations.' The first phrase states your meaning, the second phrase begs not to offend."[66] The point of a union, Schnaufer continued, was to draw members in to these political principles, not delude them into a false form of power. Failing to educate members on a "union program and the need for concerted action" weakened the aims of union. "It's as if you were sterilizing and fertilizing the plant at the same time," he warned the Milwaukee teachers. Convinced, the MTU adopted strike wording in its program.

Nonetheless, the MTU's clear-spoken assertion of its political aims and affiliations proved to hold an insufficient appeal for Milwaukee teachers. In February 1964, the union lost its representative election by a substantial margin—2,249 votes to 1,645

[62]"Letter to Allen Engel," March 20, 1964, Folder 252, Box 76, Series XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[63]"Celebrate Our Anniversary," *MTU Newsletter*, April 1963, Folder 252, Box 75, Series, XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[64]"The Truth Squad of the Milwaukee Teachers' Union," Folder 252, Box 76, Series XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[65]This concern animated the bulk of the debate around public-sector unions, writ large. Even labor-liberal leaders like former Milwaukee mayor Frank Zeidler were adamantly opposed to public-sector strikes, revealing a deep-seated contradiction in liberals' support for unions and their conception of the state. See Frank Zeidler, "Public Servants as Organized Labor," *The Municipality*, Feb. 1972, pp. 32-44; Tula A. Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[66]"Letter from AFT Assistant to the President, Pete Schnaufer, to MTU leader Allen Engel," March 20, 1964, Folder 252, Box 76, Series XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

votes.[67] While teachers in Milwaukee voted in 1964 to legally form a union, they had rejected the political dimensions offered by the union—namely, labor affiliation, use of direct actions, interest in broader political problems—in favor of a narrow organization concerned with protecting the status of members. As the next section lays out, teachers' reasons for choosing the association over the union became as significant as the choice itself. The basis on which the MTEA formed its power contained two key contradictions that are embedded within the class position of teachers, as the next sections detail. First, the MTEA failed to engage with the racial and economic inequities *outside of schools*. The MTEA's sense of material benefit did not include the public school system, writ large. Second, within schools, the MTEA sought to bolster teachers' control by strengthening their power *over* students, rather than with them. Teachers both endured domination of their own and dispensed it. In both cases, these limited class struggles disabled practices necessary to transform class structures.

Contradiction No. 1: Affirming Inequalities Outside of Schools

What effect did the MTEA's style of rhetoric and vision have on the union's subsequent class struggle? As detailed in the previous section, as a union, the MTEA formed around a vision of "political independence." In effect, this translated into a program of non-engagement with the broader political and economic conditions of public education in the state. Shortly after the MTEA's election victory, Milwaukee public schools entered a state of crisis—growing class sizes had pushed teachers and students to a breaking point.[68] Yet, the MTEA's preferences, practices, and theories of political consequence offered few paths for the union to address critical structural conditions, such as public education underfunding.

By contrast, the MTU (which had not immediately disbanded upon its election loss and continued to operate as a minority union, populated by its most committed members) became a vocal proponent for more funding for public education. The MTU decried the insufficient school funding system; weak teacher training, recruitment, and retention; and rising migration to Milwaukee as the causes of this imbalance. Because of growing class sizes, the MTU asserted, Milwaukee public school students had little access to art, music, or gym classes, as well as insufficient counseling and therapy for students; a school curriculum that did not address the "true role of minorities in our country's history"; the increasing segregation of schools; and schools' failures to deal with the psychodynamics of racism.

Following the MTU's lead, the MTEA, the official bargaining representative of teachers, similarly called for increased funding for Milwaukee public schools, though less forcefully than the MTU. Like the MTU, the MTEA petitioned for more specialty teachers to teach music, art, and gym in elementary schools, more school aides to support teachers, a specific program to reduce class sizes, and an expanded

[67] "National Unit Lauds MTEA for Victory," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Feb. 14, 1964.

[68] "Crisis in the Milwaukee Public Schools," Dec. 7, 1966, Folder 14, Box 103, Amos Case, Part I, Lloyd A. Barbee Paper, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

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program for students needing therapeutic treatment and those with disciplinary problems.[69]

Yet, although both the MTEA and the MTU called for additional funds for schools, each proposed different plans for financing its plans. MTU members expressed their commitments to re-envisioning school funding mechanisms by joining several working groups about educational finance, backing legislation to raise tax limits for schools, and even proposing their own initiatives to increase the county's income tax to fund Milwaukee schools in order to offset the growing pressures on property taxes.[70] When the MTU presented its proposal to reduce classes in schools to fifteen pupils per classroom, school board members scoffed at the demand, derisively dubbing it the "million dollar proposal." Yet, as an MTU member retorted, "If we don't propose these things, who will?" Certainly, the teacher added, "the taxpayers alliance won't."[71] Real change in schools and communities, MTU teachers believed, must be demanded through a strong and creative teachers' union, capable of both identifying and redefining the political horizon.

The MTEA's records, in contrast, showed little attention to the mechanisms by which schools were funded, save teachers' broad support for a sales tax increase to fund schools.[72] Unlike income taxes, sales taxes disproportionately burden low-income residents. Thus, while both the MTEA and the MTU called for more funding in schools to offset the growing pressures on public education, the MTU called for more socially redistributive measures. However, in 1967, the MTU lost its second attempt to become the representative bargaining agent. Shortly thereafter, the union dissolved, leaving the MTEA as teachers' sole organization.[73]

As the district's financial conditions continued to worsen through 1967, the MTEA's contract negotiations had stalled.[74] To assist the bargaining impasse, the MTEA requested help from the national union, the National Education Association (NEA), and the state affiliate, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), to conduct an investigation to facilitate a settlement between the union and the board.[75]

[69]"Schools Ask $1.6 Million for Pay Raises," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Sept. 28, 1964.

[70]"MTU Supports Bill to Raise Tax Limits," *MTU Newsletter*, March 1963, Folder 252, Box 76, Series XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL; "Support Sought for City Income Tax," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Feb. 15, 1965.

[71]"Make the Classroom Safer," *MTU Newsletter*, March 1963.

[72]"Teacher Vote Backs Boost in Sales Tax," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 2, 1967.

[73]Local 252 per capita union dues, Folder 252, Box 14, Series XII, Part II, AFT Collections Inventory, WPRL.

[74]With prodding from the Milwaukee Teachers' Union, the MTEA conducted a campaign to increase the tax rate for Milwaukee and advocate for greater state aid. The MTU had begun planning rallies and actions, even calling for a strike as early as 1966, to draw attention to the financial crisis faced by Milwaukee public schools. See "Union Rally Planned on School Aid," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 14, 1967; "Union: 'Compel State to Raise Funds," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 31, 1967. See Folder 8, Box 113, AFT Organizing Department Records, WPRL, for more details.

[75]"Statement of Termination for the Milwaukee Investigation," Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, Dec. 1968, Folder 3, Box 991, Series 2, National Education Association Records-Commissions, Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University, Washington, DC. Hereafter GWU.

Between August and October 1967, NEA officials examined the conditions of education in Milwaukee, deploying national staff to Milwaukee for four days of on-site research. They met with teacher groups, community groups, the Board of Education, members of the state legislature, even the governor. Based on their research, the NEA issued a public report announcing the severity of Milwaukee's problems.[76] In part owing to the NEA's efforts, Wisconsin legislators passed a bill supplying Milwaukee public schools with additional aid and authority to levy higher property taxes several weeks later. The MTEA felt its political demands had been satisfied and requested that the NEA adjourn its investigation.[77]

Yet NEA officers were not satisfied. Unlike MTEA teachers, the NEA did not see the increase of aid to Milwaukee as a sufficient remedy to the bigger problems at play in Milwaukee. During the committee's study of Milwaukee, members had noted not merely deficiencies in the *amount* of state aid the school district received, but also problems in its *distribution* to predominantly Black and low-income schools. Insufficient resources allocated to Black and poor schools exacerbated racial and economic inequalities in the district; simply securing increases in the amount of aid would not guarantee the just administration of funds. Yet the MTEA had actively rejected a broader analysis.

What's more, some NEA staff members had been particularly troubled by the MTEA's unwillingness to examine racial inequalities in the school system. MTEA officials, an NEA report noted, "attempted to redirect the committee's attention to matters like financial support from the state legislature and to *disallow inquiry* [emphasis added] into other matters of concern to interested citizens such as racial tension and the adequacy of education for poverty groups."[78] Members of the NEA's special investigation committee also bristled at newspaper statements released by the MTEA declaring that the "separation of the races" would not be examined unless it had a direct effect on the curriculum or one of the areas covered by the investigation.[79]

This lack of concern with the root causes of inequality in Milwaukee schools left many members of the NEA's special investigation committee feeling as if the MTEA had taken advantage of them. The NEA had been called in by the MTEA for the national organization's muscle and political clout when the MTEA needed help, but the MTEA had no interest in the NEA's assessment of the situation, nor did it show willingness to heed the NEA's recommendations. While the committee eventually closed the investigation per the MTEA's request, the affair revealed the MTEA's resistance to addressing

[76]"Milwaukee, Wisconsin Investigation Committee Statement," Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, June 1968, Folder 3, Box 991, Series 2, National Education Association Records-Commissions, Special Collections Research Center, GWU.

[77]"Milwaukee, Wisconsin Investigation Committee Statement."

[78]"Resignation letter from Mrs. Frances Jaeschke to NEA Legal Counsel John R. Grinnell," Sept. 16, 1968, Folder 4, Box 991, Series 2, Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, Special Collections Research Center, National Education Association Records-Commissions, GWU. NEA was not the only group upset by this turn of events. Community groups like United Community Action Group were also troubled by MTEA's disregard of racial inequalities. See Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 129-52.

[79]Dahlk, *Against the Wind*, 129-52.

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racial segregation, particularly when directed to do so by a higher authority, such as the national NEA office.

The MTEA's commitment to a union with "no outside influences" stunted its capacity to propose meaningful solutions for the material and racial inequalities facing Milwaukee public schools. Yet, as the next section shows, the MTEA similarly struggled to address structural inequities within the Milwaukee public schools.

Contradiction No. 2: Workplace Dignity via Student Discipline

By the early 1960s, the Great Migration of southern Blacks to northern cities had peaked in Milwaukee. In the 1950s, Milwaukee's Black population rose 187 percent, the highest rate of increase of any major city during that decade. Subject to acute housing and employment discrimination, most Black residents lived in a concentrated area of blocks, known as the "inner core." The residents of the inner core were subjects of significant anxiety among White Milwaukeeans, who considered the major causes of Black Milwaukeeans' geographic and economic segregation to be Black peoples' "lack of acculturation" to White Milwaukee's values and cultures. In a desperate attempt to address the inferior living conditions of the inner core, Mayor Frank Zeidler commissioned a report in 1960 to study the neighborhood. "The great problem of all newcomers to the core area of the city," the report stated, "is orientation and acculturation to the life of a highly industrialized urban community." The report defined newcomers' "deficiencies" almost exclusively in individual and psychological terms.[80]

The solutions Zeidler offered, while not concrete, reflected the vogue policy ideas of the period. "Compensatory education" programs, the report asserted, would help children from the inner core overcome their "impoverished" home life, which ill prepared them to "accept, comprehend, and use" the regular curriculum of schools, and to acculturate to the "the values and practices of mainstream America."[81] However, Zeidler's term as mayor ended five days after the report was published. The problems of the "inner core" became the charge of his successor, Mayor Henry Maier. Maier, a liberal with close alliances to Milwaukee's business and real estate interests, was far less eager than Zeidler to pursue essential anti-poverty strategies, such as housing reform. Maier turned to philanthropic foundations for solutions to address the problem of the inner core. In 1963, Maier received a grant from the Ford Foundation to fund a pilot program for compensatory education for "in-migrant" students, one of a few select cities around the country to receive such an award.[82] Milwaukee became an early leader in

[80] This was not a discourse unique to Milwaukee, but embedded in social science agendas and liberal thoughts, especially channeled through philanthropic foundations. See Alice O'Connor, "Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight against Poverty: The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 5 (1996), 586-625; Leah Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[81] Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1960), 11.

[82] Henry Maier, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1993), 41.

compensatory education; its program provided a national model for what would ultimately become the backbone of Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).[83]

In Milwaukee, compensatory education was as much a program to "fix" the cultural deficiencies of individual students as it was to solve poverty.[84] Its programs included orientation centers for "in-migrant and transient" students, cultural enrichment activities, after-school reading and study centers, additional reading centers, increased counseling programs, school-work projects, and secretary development programs.[85] For some Milwaukee educational policymakers, Black families were assumed not to value education the same as Whites; schools were thus tasked with countering these deficiencies.[86] Some Black Milwaukeeans, such as the Urban League's Wesley Scott, saw compensatory education as an important job preparation program for Black Milwaukeeans looking for work.[87] In either case, schools were integral to the strategy for fixing poverty—not by addressing the organization of the economy or intervening in the prerogatives of private corporations, but rather, by altering the characteristics of the poor themselves.

In this paradigm, teachers became the unacknowledged foot soldiers of the nation's war on poverty.[88] Title I, a core program of ESEA, for example, offered little to no extra compensation for teachers' work. Across the country, teachers were held responsible for addressing the roots of racial and economic inequality, yet afforded little extra pay or training to do this work.[89] Yet, absent a structural analysis of inequality and the role of schools therein, educators could not push against this framing of inequality, but merely react to its charges against their work.

In Milwaukee, as elsewhere, this manifested as growing calls for stronger discipline policies and greater physical control over classrooms. As civil rights groups pressed for desegregated schools, the MTEA not only opposed many of the initial calls, but

[83]Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle*, 66–69.

[84]Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice*; Harvey Kantor, "Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s," *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 1 (1991), 47–83; Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, "Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education," in *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*, ed. Prudence Carter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25-39.

[85]"Racial Imbalance in the Milwaukee Public Schools," Report by Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1966, File 10, Box 1, Milwaukee Public Schools Collection (MSS 1680), Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI.

[86]"Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools," Special Committee on the Equality of Educational Opportunity, 1965, Folder 18, Box 1, Series 2, Lorraine M. Radtke Papers, WHS.

[87]Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle*, 67.

[88]This assertion can even be heard in Dougherty's own historical commentary. He suggests that compensatory education gained popularity among Milwaukee school officials because it "placed the blame for black student academic failure squarely on the shoulders of culturally deprived families rather than on educators" (*More Than One Struggle*, 68).

[89]Launor Carter, "The Sustaining Effects Study of Compensatory and Elementary Education," *Educational Researcher* 13, no. 7 (1984), 4–13; Adam R. Nelson, "The Elementary and Secondary Education Act at Fifty: A Changing Federal Role in American Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (April 2016), 358-61.

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doubled down on its program for school security. In 1963, when the school board crafted a discipline policy that allowed teachers to physically strike a student out of defense or to stop a breach of discipline, the MTEA denounced the plan as not going far enough. It criticized the policy as "very restrictive," and demanded instead a policy that allowed teachers to physically strike students. According to MTEA spokesperson Donald Feilbach, teachers should have more latitude to physically strike misbehaving students, no matter the reason.[90] Protecting teachers' disciplinary power became a key motivation for the teachers to secure collective bargaining powers.

The MTEA soon found itself face to face with Black students and civil rights organizers. On May 18, 1964, 1,600 Black students in Milwaukee—more than 60 percent of the district's Black students—walked out of the city's segregated and unequal public schools. Their action marked a new phase of Milwaukee's civil rights movement: one that deployed direct actions to address racial inequalities. The students waged the boycott with support from the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) as well as the Milwaukee NAACP. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the MTEA issued a public statement defending the predominantly White Milwaukee teachers, especially those working in the predominantly Black "inner core." But more unexpectedly, the MTEA passed a resolution—the union's first ever public political statement—denouncing the student-led boycott. "By its very nature," the resolution asserted, "the boycott encourages disrespect for law and order and fosters further breaches of student discipline."[91] (See Figure 2.)

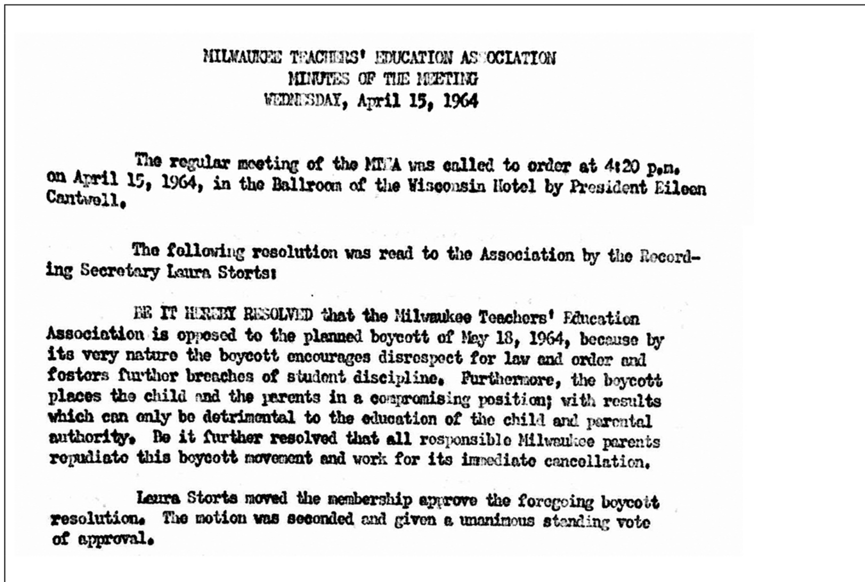
Rather than support calls for desegregated schools, the MTEA sought to create a culture of "law and order" in the Milwaukee public schools, particularly the inner-city, predominantly Black schools. For many teachers, the MTEA became not only the teachers' instrument to demand greater *empowerment* for teachers to administer physical discipline for students, but also the organization that asserted teachers' need for greater *protection* from unruly, inner-city students. In this way, the MTEA's earliest and shrillest demands conjured a drama animated by racialized and gender specters: predominantly White women, working as caregivers, turned to unions as a way to seek protection from predominantly Black students.[92]

The MTEA voiced its concerns not only to the school administration, but also to the city's carceral apparatus. In the spring of 1964, when a student at Roosevelt Junior High, a school populated almost exclusively by Black students on the north side of Milwaukee, attacked a principal with a knife, the MTEA turned to the local police force for help. President Eileen Cantwell requested a meeting with the superintendent, the mayor, the police chief, the district attorney, the juvenile judge, and the police youth aid bureau to discuss "a more stringent law enforcement program." As the MTEA executive board stated, "While we all recognize that there are a number of long-range goals of the school board and your office aimed at alleviating such 'wrongs' as overloaded classes, expanded sociological and psychological counseling services, specialized educational

[90] "School Discipline Policy Assailed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 14, 1963.

[91] MTEA Building Representative Minutes, April 15, 1964, MTEA archives.

[92] "Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools, 1965," Folder 18, Box 1, Series 2, Lorraine M. Radtke Papers, WHS.


MILWAUKEE TEACHERS' EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, April 15, 1964

The regular meeting of the MTEA was called to order at 4:20 p.m. on April 15, 1964, in the Ballroom of the Wisconsin Hotel by President Eileen Cantwell.

The following resolution was read to the Association by the Recording Secretary Laura Storts:

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association is opposed to the planned boycott of May 18, 1964, because by its very nature the boycott encourages disrespect for law and order and fosters further breaches of student discipline. Furthermore, the boycott places the child and the parents in a compromising position; with results which can only be detrimental to the education of the child and parental authority. Be it further resolved that all responsible Milwaukee parents repudiate this boycott movement and work for its immediate cancellation.

Laura Storts moved the membership approve the foregoing boycott resolution. The motion was seconded and given a unanimous standing vote of approval.

Figure 2. The MTEA's first resolution, passed against Milwaukee's civil rights movement school boycott protesting school segregation.
Photo courtesy of MTEA archives, Milwaukee, WI.

training and other programs," they underscored, "the need to protect our teachers is immediate."[93]

First and foremost, the MTEA wanted more security, including police patrols, in and around schools.[94] It demanded increases in state money to hire guards for certain "disruptor" schools. (In these demands, the only school the MTEA mentioned by name was North Division High School, the predominantly Black high school on the north side of town.) When Black parents spoke out against the plan to place guards in schools, the board overturned the MTEA's proposal. Irate with the board's rejection, the MTEA threatened to shut down inner-city schools. "We feel that the verbal and physical assaults by students cannot be tolerated and feel this cannot continue if the teaching staff is to provide productive experiences for young people," declared MTEA leader Donald Feilbach.[95] Speaking on behalf of her members, President Cantwell told the press that "teachers feel that whole policy of handling juvenile delinquents is too lenient.… It's time to tighten up."[96] Significantly, the question of what constituted

[93]Letter from MTEA President Eileen Cantwell to MPS Superintendent Harold Vincent, March 20, 1964, MTEA Executive Board minutes, MTEA archives.

[94]Anxious about intruders, teachers especially desired more police patrol on school grounds, to prevent "youths not in school from entering schools looking for a girl friend or for accosting pupils in the school grounds." See "'Make our Schools Safe' - MTEA Plea," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 20, 1964; "Police Hike Attention to School," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 13, 1964.

[95]"Teachers Demand Safety in Rowdy Core Schools," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 7, 1968.

[96]"'Make Our Schools Safe' - MTEA Plea"; "Stabbing Sentence Held 'Pat on Hand,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 29, 1964.

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delinquent behavior for MTEA members was partially a response to Milwaukee's growing civil rights movement. The MTEA viewed the civil rights groups' direct-action tactics as a form of unruly, criminal behavior. It equated protest with crime.[97]

By 1968, as students continued to organize protests in schools, the MTEA's emphasis on law and order, student discipline, and opposition to the direct-action organizing efforts of the civil rights movement fused a distinct racialized frontier in its budding political vision.. When student organizers held a demonstration demanding more Black history curriculum and more African American cooking staff, twenty to thirty teachers joined their protests. The MTEA immediately called for the firing of all the teachers who attended the demonstration for "promoting insurrection" in schools. "Not only is this a breach of ethics, but it verges on criminal action in our judgment."[98] The MTEA's concerns over student discipline fused with its opposition to civil rights groups' struggles for racial justice in schools.[99] Milwaukee teachers aligned with school administrators' calls for "law and order."

As the civil rights movement's campaign against segregated schools escalated into a legal suit against segregated schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the MTEA maintained its commitments to law and order. In 1972, MTEA delegates voted overwhelmingly *not* to support civil rights lawyer Lloyd Barbee's case asserting that Milwaukee school officials intentionally maintained segregated facilities. Seventy-one MTEA representatives wanted to support the suit; 103 did not. One particularly hostile teacher even attempted to rally MTEA members to wage a countersuit to prove "the individuals who have filed [the desegregation suit] are attempting to destroy the school systems in this country."[100] MTEA delegates nervously moved to a secret ballot to this provocation. Although the countersuit proposal was defeated, neither were Milwaukee teachers moved to support the desegregation lawsuit. Perhaps a union more concerned with actively forming members' consciousness and democratic deliberation could have differently handled teachers' ambiguous preferences.

Yet, despite a quite varied set of beliefs, the teachers' union leadership responded with resistance to both desegregation and compensatory education programs. When Milwaukee Public schools unveiled a pilot study for a breakfast program for students funded by a federal child nutrition program in 1967, MTEA teachers voted to oppose the program. "I'm not opposed to feeding breakfast to children," a sixth-grade

[97] Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[98] "Teachers Demand Safety in Rowdy Core Schools."

[99] The fusing of particular, distinct demands into a common "logic of equivalence" (in this case, "more school discipline" = "oppose civil rights") enabled MTEA teachers to form a unified sense of "us" vs. "them" ("them" constituted as inner-city students and activists), what Ernesto Laclau calls the frontier of "populist reasoning." These two factors, logics of equivalence and the creation of a frontier, provided the discursive platform for a collective identity to emerge, for teachers to become not just teachers who are members of MTEA, but MTEA teachers. Demands, Laclau posits, summon the collective identity that establishes the group; the group doesn't issue the demands. This discursive construction characterizes what Laclau refers to as populism, a particular system of political logics that centers certain factors in the foreground and excludes other elements. For more, see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005).

[100] MTEA Building Representative Minutes, Feb. 9, 1972, MTEA archives.

teacher told the *Milwaukee Journal*. "But if the government wants to feed them, let them hire their own people to run the program. We are not in the restaurant business."[101]

On the one hand, teachers' lackluster enthusiasm toward the breakfast program can be interpreted as evidence of teachers' narrowly defined self-interest, particularly when the duties in question required providing additional care for inner-city students. The very title of the *Milwaukee Journal* article on the subject, "Teachers Unwilling to Feed Pupils," suggests as much, censuring teachers for reneging on societal expectations to incessantly care for others. But on the other hand, teachers' refusal to accept additional duties can be read as an attempt to protect and defend their work as professional educators, or, more basically, as a rejection of more work for no extra pay. Their refusal of additional care duties may have in part been their attempt to assert the intellectual and social boundaries around their primary work responsibilities. The work of teaching was not guided by some infinite set of feminized instincts, such as women's supposed "natural" disposition to care and nurture, but rather required skills and energy; its protection demanded limits. Professionalism became a means for teachers to valorize those skills, thereby improving their working conditions. In reality, both teachers' defense of the boundaries of their work as well as narrowly defined self-interests were integrally linked.

Over the next decade, tensions regarding the movement for racial equity and the MTEA's unwillingness to act in solidarity with a broader teachers' union movement came to a head. In the early 1970s, teachers across Wisconsin began to develop more militant strategies—namely, the waging of strikes—to advance their demands, which, in Wisconsin, included racial justice demands.[102] Yet, the MTEA explicitly rejected WEAC's calls for labor solidarity as a threat to the local's ability to exercise "local control," and disaffiliated from the state and national union in 1974. While this choice preserved the MTEA's local autonomy, its absence from the larger state labor movement created two long-lasting consequences. First, it weakened the power and direction of the state labor movement, forcing its strategies away from strikes and direct actions and toward legal means, such as interest arbitration and mediation.[103] Second, the MTEA's actions strengthened alliances between civil rights activists and free-market educational reformers, who gained power in Milwaukee in the mid-1980s.[104]

[101]MTEA Building Representative minutes, Feb. 8, 1967, MTEA archives; "Teachers Unwilling to Help Feed Pupils," *Milwaukee Journal*, Feb. 9, 1967.

[102]Shelton, *Teacher Strike!*; Eleni Brelis Schirmer, "When Solidarity Doesn't Quite Strike: The 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin Teachers' Strike and the Rise of Neoliberalism," *Gender and Education* 29, no. 1 (2016), 8-27.

[103]Schirmer, "When Solidarity Doesn't Quite Strike."

[104]Mikel Holt, *Not Yet "Free at Last": The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement: Our Battle for School Choice* (Oakland, CA: ICS Press, 2000); James K. Nelsen, "From No Choice to Forced Choice: A History of Educational Options in Milwaukee Public Schools" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2012); Howard Fuller, *No Struggle, No Progress: A Warrior's Life from Black Power to Education Reform* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014); Thomas C. Pedroni, *Market Movements: African American Involvement in Voucher School Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

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Conclusion

In their pivotal study of working-class formation and urban education, Katznelson and Weir lament that working-class concern with education had all but disappeared by the 1950s. Yet over the next decade, more teachers would join unions than virtually any other point in history. How did the rise of teacher unionism coincide with the evacuation of working-class politics from schools? As this article suggests, working-class politics wasn't as much evacuated as it shifted forms. . This article traces the class formation of the Milwaukee teachers' union, Wisconsin's largest public-sector union, to explore how teachers' interests and dispositions were shaped and in turn shaped the political economy. Milwaukee teachers opted to unionize with the group that pledged to eschew the traditional union pillars, namely solidarity and coordinated actions. As such, the "working-class" influence didn't as much disappear as change into an almost unrecognizable—even anathematic—form.

Milwaukee teachers' choices were not unique. The union's two formative conflicts—the duel between the professional association and the labor union, and the opposition to the civil rights movement's charge against segregated schools—similarly unfolded in other unions across the country. Yet unlike other large urban locals with bargaining rights, the Milwaukee teachers elected the professional association—a body that decried the spirit of unionism—as their bargaining representative. The professional association both disengaged from and opposed broader struggles about school funding and civil rights organizing.

Yet as civil rights movements grew nationally and in Milwaukee, schools increasingly became hailed in the 1960s as the mechanism to solve both poverty and racial segregation.[105] Facing these pressures, Milwaukee teachers responded with a reactionary instinct to gain power over students, rather than the political and economic forces affecting their work. Not only did this breed a racist set of politics and weaken alliances with Black educational activists, it also narrowed the set of political possibilities they could mobilize for and demand.

Nonetheless, the MTEA's vision of unionism was hardly preordained. Although they did not successfully win union leadership, between the late 1930 and the late 1960s, a militant minority of teachers advocated for a different vision of unionism and public education. These teachers saw the union as a way to improve public education for teachers, students, and communities—not merely secure teachers' professional status. But without formal representation, the group eventually dissolved. Still, teachers' beliefs regarding integration, compensatory education, and school funding were more varied than those represented by the union leadership. By examining the residual tendencies of the Milwaukee teachers' union, in addition to the dominant ones, this article aims to identify the fragmentary nature of the class formation of public-sector workers in Wisconsin in the mid-twentieth century.[106] An analysis of how teachers' rhetoric and dispositions merged with structural formations (such as legislation granting teachers

[105] Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, "Class, Race and the Emergence of Federal Education Policy: From the New Deal to the Great Society," *Educational Researcher* 24, no. 3 (1995), 4-11; Kantor and Lowe, "Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education."

[106] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

collective bargaining rights) reveals the class formation of Wisconsin's largest public-sector union, drawing to light the basis on which it formed its power. In doing so, it opens up future research avenues to trace how the Milwaukee teachers' unions narrow political concerns may have ceded ground to the expansion of the right-wing educational reform network. This network, an amalgamation of Black activists, free-market conservatives, and religious fundamentalists, achieved a major political victory in the early 1990s, when Milwaukee established a school voucher program; today it is the country's oldest and largest voucher program.[107] The success of Milwaukee's "school choice" movement incubated Governor Scott Walker's ascent to the state governor a few decades later.

Today, scholars and journalists have probed the rise of conservativism in Wisconsin through groundbreaking chronicles of the unparalleled rise of the Tea Party in the state; the emergence of "politics of resentment" among White working class people; the divide-and-conquer strategy adopted by state Republicans; and the debilitating effects of the free-market welfare system.[108] Yet little attention has been paid to the other half of the puzzle: how might labor's own choices have contributed to the demise of social democracy in the state?[109] What consequences did the fragmentary organization of the public-sector unions have on future struggles? Through an examination of the early formation of the Milwaukee teachers' union, this paper begins to address some of these questions.

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[107]By the 1990s, many Black activists had aligned with conservative free-market activists and religious fundamentalists to create the nation's first state-funded, private voucher education system. Pedroni, *Market Movements*.

[108]Dan Kaufman, *The Fall of Wisconsin: The Conservative Conquest of a Progressive Bastion and the Future of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018); Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016); Katherine Cramer Walsh, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016); Phil Wilayto, *The Feeding Trough: The Bradley Foundation, "The Bell Curve" and the Real Story behind W-2, Wisconsin's National Model for Welfare Reform: An Investigative Report* (Milwaukee: The Campaign, 1997).

[109]Saltzman, "A Progressive Experiment"; Arvid Anderson, "Labor Relations in the Public Service," *Labor Law Journal* 12, no. 11 (Nov. 1961), 1069-94; Walsh, *The Politics of Resentment*; Kaufman, *The Fall of Wisconsin*; Jane L. Collins and H. Jacob Carlson, "State Phobia, Then and Now: Three Waves of Conflict over Wisconsin's Public Sector, 1930-2013," *Social Science History* 42, no. 1 (2018), 57-80; Jane Collins, "Theorizing Wisconsin's 2011 Protests: Community-Based Unionism Confronts Accumulation by Dispossession," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (Feb. 2012), 6-20.

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