

Quality of teachers

Teacher Pay and Teacher Quality. By Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky. Kalamazoo, MI, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1997, 185 pp.

This is a very well written and researched book that teachers, labor economists, education policymakers and compensation specialists will enjoy. The book is filled with charts, graphs, regression analysis tables, and algebraic expressions. The authors use empirical data collected over many years from a variety of sources to show the relationship between teacher pay and teacher quality. The conclusion the authors reach may surprise you.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report on the condition of American education entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The Commission's concerns centered on the quality of teaching. Among their claims were the following:

- Too many teachers had been poor students themselves.
- Programs of teacher education placed too much emphasis on the methods of education, and too little on the subject to be taught.
- There were severe shortages of qualified teachers in certain subject areas, such as science and mathematics.
- Too many newly employed teachers were not qualified to teach the subjects they were assigned.

These concerns were not new. In 1963, the president of the Council for Basic Education described teacher education in the following terms: "A weak faculty operates a weak program that attracts weak students".

The question this book seeks to answer is: Does an increase in teacher compensation equate to an increase in teacher quality? Will an increase in pay attract

higher quality teachers into the profession, and how will that relate to improved student test scores? The answers are summarized below.

- *Higher teacher salaries have had little discernible impact on the quality of newly recruited teachers.*

The authors found essentially no discernible relationship between salary growth and the qualifications of new teachers compared with experienced teachers in the same state. After testing for biases, the conclusion remained the same.

- *The failure of this policy can be traced, in part, to the structural features of the teacher labor market.*

Teacher salary schedules are not differentiated on the basis of performance. When pay rises for one, it rises for the entire salary schedule. The result of increase pay for the same performance is lower attrition of seasoned teachers. A lower attrition rate means less new hires. Additionally, prospective teachers have high opportunity costs in occupation-specific training that has no value outside public education. Teacher certification is not a highly transferable skill.

- *Recruitment of higher quality teachers is impeded by public schools that show no preference for applicants with strong academic records.*

Little is known about the way school districts screen job applicants; however, case studies provide some anecdotal evidence. New teacher applicants are not generally asked to teach a class as part of the interview process. Some research suggests that school recruiters give too much weight to the impression the applicant makes during the interview, and too little to the academic record. Webster's (1988) study of hiring and evaluation showed that teachers' scores on verbal and quantitative tests were the best predictors of student achievement test gains.

- *A variety of reforms have been proposed that might lower entry barriers and improve job prospects of more capable prospective teachers.*

Salary differentiation on the basis of performance could provide encouragement for teachers without stimulating an increase in the supply of teachers. Licensing and certification requirements could be relaxed for individuals who demonstrate promise in other ways. Teacher tenure and other job protections could be weakened, making it easier for administrators to dismiss ineffective teachers.

- *The practices of private schools indicate that market based reforms would improve the quality of the teacher applicant pool.*

Private schools place greater emphasis on the teacher's academic record. They are more likely to have performance based pay than strict salary schedules. Private school entrepreneurs appear ready to provide education services to a wide variety of students, not just the most affluent. Opposition from the public school sector is intense. This opposition has influenced charter school legislation and the design of other target school plans.

Instead of offering new solutions or policy recommendations, the authors highlight proposals that were discussed in the book.

On the supply side of the market, reduce the opportunity cost by relaxing licensing requirements so that promising applicants can seek jobs without investing in a credential that they may never have the opportunity to use. There are many private schools that employ this method allowing the beginning teacher to complete the necessary course work once they have started teaching. Relaxed licensing requirements are already a policy of alternative certification programs established to recruit minority teachers in shortage areas. At a minimum, the relaxed certification and licensing requirements should be expanded throughout the public school systems with the purpose of recruiting better teachers.

The demand side of the market may require additional reforms. School districts

must change their preference for applicants with traditional training and must look to non-education majors with strong academic backgrounds. The authors are doubtful this can be accomplished and discuss this in detail in chapter 5 of the book. The authors are, however, more optimistic about other reforms such as the charter school movement. Charter schools compete for students and are run by entrepreneurs who compete in the educational services market. These schools are strongly opposed by interests within the public school community, raising the possibility that charter schools will become isolated pockets of quality while business goes on as usual.

—Kathleen Chapman
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Future of unions

Unions at the Crossroads: Strategic Membership, Financial, and Political Perspectives. By Marick F. Masters. Westport, CT, Quorum Books, 1997, 231 pp., bibliography. \$65.

The future of American labor unions is the subject of this book. But Masters' creative contribution is his processing and analyzing of a vast quantity of data relating to trends in union membership, organizing activity, financial assets, income and spending, including political action money. He gets a lot more than you would expect out of the LM-2 financial forms unions are required to file with the U.S. Department of Labor.

Masters, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, puts his focus on the "institutional health" of the 28 biggest national unions in the United States, their resources and ability to engage in collective bargaining, to finance strikes, to organize new union members, and to affect their political environment. These 28 unions have 80 percent of all U.S. union members. Five of them hold two-thirds of all union wealth.

What are union resources? Unions have human capital in their members, their union density or share of the relevant work force, and their activism, says Masters. They have financial capital in their real and financial assets and income, he says, and political capital in their political action money. While you could argue about the scope of these definitions, Masters lays out his detailed aggregate and union-by-union analysis as a preface to his discussion of strategic union resource decisions.

How should unions use available resources? Union financial capital and political capital have been rising at the same time that unions' human capital base and dues income have been shrinking, Masters finds. But without big growth in organizing and a big increase in union membership and union density, labor unions will be weaker in bargaining and less relevant in politics.

Union financial resources are relevant to growth in union membership. In 1995, the 28 unions of Masters' study had 13 million members. Simply to overcome attrition and keep at their current total, these unions must add more than 650,000 new members a year, Masters says. To grow by 1 percent a year, they would have to add still another 800,000 a year, he claims. And to grow by 10 percent a year would require more than 2 million new union members beyond the attrition replacements. Masters estimates 1995 cost per additional union member at about \$1,800—so a steady-state membership target would cost \$6 billion over 5 years, 1 percent growth would cost \$7 billion over 5 years, and 10 percent growth would cost \$22 billion.

There are 48 data-rich tables, many showing trends from 1979 to 1993. Twelve tables present "real" constant dollar assets, income, PAC receipts, and union budgets. Only the first table (page 74) tells us how current dollars are adjusted (CPI 1982–1984=100).

This book is not for the general reader who will bog down in a wealth of detail and pedestrian and sometimes repetitious prose. But if you are interested in unions

and their prospects for the future, the Masters book is well worth the effort.

—Markley Roberts
Labor economist,
formerly with the AFL-CIO

Labor history

WCFL: Chicago's Voice of Labor, 1926–1978. By Nathan Godfried. Champaign, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1997, 390 pp. \$49.95 cloth; \$19.95, paper.

The gods in Greek mythology punished the mortal Sisyphus for deceiving them by forcing him to eternally push a large stone up a hill only to have it roll back down. The proponents of labor broadcasting at the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) must have entertained similar frustrations while founding radio station WCFL. CFL President John Fitzpatrick and Secretary Edward Nockels faced many barriers trying to fulfill their dream for a working-class-oriented radio station only to stumble over new ones constructed by the controlling political paradigm. The crusade for a "voice of labor" began in 1926 and, when the dream finally became reality, both its founding fathers were deceased and the station's format was subsumed into the commercial, capitalist order it wanted to oppose. The author recognizes this conflict from the beginning in noting that mass media, like mass production, was a product of capitalism and the dominant reactive force—labor capitalism—actually constructed the evolution of a working-class medium.

Nathan Godfried's narrative is really two books in one. The first story relates how Edward Nockels sacrificed everything to establish a voice for the working classes over the airways. Opposed to his effort was a plethora of antagonists including the commercially-owned stations; Godfried interestingly illustrates that the call letters of some stations—the Sears & Roebuck-owned facility "WLS" was an acronym for "world's largest store" and that the Chi-

cago Tribune's station "WGN" translated into "world's greatest newspaper." The author contends that these and similar monopoly-capitalistic forces—virulently anti-labor—enveloped a defacto censorship over WCFL. To add to Nockels' woes, the established labor order in the American Federation of Labor offered "luke-warm" support at best and many times outright opposition. A third source of anguish for Nockels and Fitzpatrick was the Federal Government's regulatory agencies, the Federal Radio Commission and its successor the Federal Communications Commission, that viewed WCFL as a "special interest" and regulated it to the verge of suffocation by restricting broadcasting hours and relegating the station to weak broadcast channels.

The death of Nockels in 1937, from a massive heart attack that Godfried has little doubt was complicated by the barriers erected against WCFL, embarked the station on a new adventure. The radio station's history paralleled the flow of changing social and political events in the Nation. The New Deal emerged from the Great Depression and forged a corporatist social compact where labor, business, and the government shared in the reconstruction of the capitalist system. The second history of WCFL amounted to struggles for a clear broadcast signal, one unencumbered by competing signals in the kilocycle range and permission to increase its power

to 50,000 watts. Yet when the Federal Communications Commission finally acceded to WCFL's demands, the station already leaned in the direction of broadcasting popular music, sporting events, and general entertainment rather than in covering strike activity, organizing drives, and the dispute between the AFL and the rival industrial federation, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). It entered into a partnership with the NBC network, thus further neutralizing its aggressive labor support. By the 1960s it embraced a "top forty" format and in the 1970s converted to an "all-talk" programming. In 1978, WCFL was purchased and its call letters changed to WLUP.

Nathan Godfried portrays the birth, life, and death of WCFL fairly well. One grasps the basic essence of his philosophy about the subject just by reading the introduction. This book follows the "new left" paradigm of historiography that ironically became popular about the time the radio station shifted format from social and economic emphases to one of "top forty" programming. One of this school's founders, Herbert Gutman, is even quoted in an opening chapter introduction. Other monographs in this series on the "history of communications" have a similar ideological bent and their authors, for example, historian Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, are often identified as part of this school-of-thought. The capitalist establishment continues to oppose any

advances by the working classes and they have to devise new methods of advancing their causes.

While this paradigmatic interpretation is anything but new—and this is not a criticism of the book—the subject matter is intriguing. Broadcast networking was state-of-the art during the period marked by industrial domination of the U.S. economy, with all the concomitant social and economic upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s and the post-war corporatist industrial models of the 1940s and 1950s. If, as Patrick Henry once stated, we know of no better way to judge the future than by the past, this book will be a valuable contribution to the bank of knowledge as we enter the so-called "information age" and leave the "industrial age" behind. What kind of communication vehicle will organized labor utilize to drive along the information highway? The struggle to adapt and evolve through the use of technological innovation was as much the focus of labor broadcasting yesterday as it is for organized labor and the internet today. The examples of struggle for WCFL may not alleviate all the barriers constructed against labor as we enter the 21st century, but it may give some ideas to prevent workers from being between a Sisyphian rock and a hard place!

—Henry P. Guzda
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