

# Union or Professional Organization? A Librarian's Dilemma

*The concurrent development of the professional organization for librarians of the State University of New York and the union representing them is traced. In addition, the relations between the two organizations and differing viewpoints on their respective roles and functions are discussed.*

A SEARCH OF THE LITERATURE reveals that little has been written on the relationship between professional organizations and unions. One article on this subject by Marie Haug and Marvin Sussman states that historically blue collar workers have joined unions, whereas white collar workers have chosen professional organizations. The authors point out that unions grow faster in times of unemployment and professional organizations in times of labor shortages. Although their findings were tentative and problematic, they did suggest that we are no longer in a professionalizing society: "In light of the spread of unionization to professional fields and using client rejection of professional rights to unique expertise, the estimate may well be that professionalization is no longer the preferred route to job autonomy, high income, and social status for occupations with knowledge claims."<sup>1</sup>

Gail Schlachter, writing in the *Library Quarterly*, assumed a different viewpoint:

In the library field, the days of effec-

tive independent action may be over. While more librarians than ever before are currently being trained, fewer positions are available for them to fill. Students entering the profession are pessimistic about their ability to negotiate independently. Librarians, like other professionals, are becoming increasingly interested in collective action. Unions have been conducting active membership drives among librarians. But limited quantitative research indicates that, given a choice, librarians would rather affiliate with a professional association turned collective bargaining organization than a traditional labor union. These findings support the industrial relations theory that professional societies can and will be viable alternatives to traditional labor organizations. Based on historical precedent and current theory, therefore, it seems likely to suggest that only if the American Library Association responds to increasing union activity by adopting an employee orientation will it be able to maintain, like the other professional societies turned quasi unions, organizational hegemony within its field.<sup>2</sup>

Although Gail Schlachter directed her attention to a possibly altered role for the national library association, there have developed in a number of academic libraries and library systems a variety

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of associations directed to the interests of librarians. This article focuses on one such organization, the State University of New York Librarians Association (SUNYLA), primarily as that organization works in conjunction with a union, United University Professions (UUP), which represents all professional and academic employees in the State University of New York (SUNY).

#### SUNYLA, THE TAYLOR LAW, AND SPA

SUNYLA had its beginnings in the late 1960s approximately at the same time that state legislation was enacted permitting collective bargaining for public employees. There had been earlier meetings among librarians of SUNY. The chief librarians of the various units of the university met annually, and there had been conferences among librarians by type of institution (e.g., four-year colleges). But there was no official organization to bring together representatives from the ranks of all the SUNY libraries. An Academic Status Task Force Committee of librarians, including chief librarians, was established; and there resulted in 1968 the formation of SUNYLA. SUNYLA has been recognized by the central administration of the university. The association has been solicited for suggestions, and members have been named to various administrative committees as representatives of SUNYLA.

Coincident with the founding of SUNYLA, another event took place. The SUNY Board of Trustees granted academic rank to SUNY librarians effective September 1, 1968. This action caused a great deal of confusion: librarians thought they would now automatically receive all the perquisites of the teaching faculty; and, in fact, librarians on some campuses received greater benefits than on others. Not everyone in the SUNY central administration appeared to have the same idea

as to what this action entailed. Certainly, the State Division of the Budget had another view.

In this confusion SUNY librarians grew disillusioned and rapidly became a more militant and cohesive unit. It was probably no accident that the first of the four objectives of SUNYLA as stated in its constitution was "to advance the professional status of librarians of the State University of New York." When one reads minutes of the SUNYLA council, it can be seen that the majority of the meetings always come around to librarians' status. Letters, telegrams, resolutions, telephone calls, etc., were made to the chancellor and other representatives of the SUNY central administration. In addition, there were meetings with the chancellor and the chairman of the Board of Trustees. The culmination of these meetings was a November 1970 document, "The Place of Librarians in SUNY: A Position Paper," which was presented to Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer before he addressed the annual SUNYLA meeting in New York City on November 12, 1970. This position paper was endorsed by SUNYLA as well as by the SUNY Head Librarians Conference, the chancellor's Advisory Committee on Library Development, and the SUNY Faculty Senate Committee on Library Resources. Unfortunately, the chancellor was unable to answer the librarians' requests in spite of his promises to them.<sup>3</sup> Whether this was because of lack of acceptance on the part of the Division of the Budget or the advent of unionism, it is difficult to say. However, promises such as an expansion of ranks for librarians and removal of librarians from a salary schedule designed for nonteaching professionals have still not been realized.

Collective bargaining had its beginnings in January 1966 when Governor Rockefeller established the Governor's Committee on Public Employee Rela-

tions (Taylor Committee), headed by George W. Taylor. The committee issued a report in March 1966; and although the legislature did not accept all of its recommendations, the report is considered the main source for the intent of the subsequent legislation.<sup>4</sup> The law, enacted in 1968, is New York State's Public Employees' Fair Employment Act, commonly called the Taylor Law.<sup>5</sup> The Taylor Law has the following provisions: (1) it gives public employees the right to join or not join an employee organization; (2) it gives public employees the right of organization and representation by an employee organization and to negotiate collectively; (3) it requires the public employer to negotiate and enter into written agreements; (4) it establishes procedures for resolution of disputes, i.e., impasse, legislative hearings; and (5) it prohibits strikes by public employees.<sup>6</sup>

Under the provisions of this act, academic and professional employees of SUNY requested an election to decide on representation and to select a bargaining agent. This election was held late in 1970. In addition to a choice of no union, employees had a choice of one of three unions as their representative. They were the State University Federation of Teachers (SUFT), the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and the Senate Professional Association (SPA). SPA was elected bargaining agent, and it negotiated a first contract with SUNY to go into effect July 1, 1971.

The bargaining unit in the contract includes all professional employees (nonteaching professionals) and academic employees (including librarians) in the four university centers, fourteen four-year colleges, four medical centers, three specialized colleges, six two-year agricultural and technical colleges, and a few individuals in central administration. These units are spread throughout the state, and all have different prob-

lems. Involved are about 16,000 employees. Of this total approximately 400 are librarians. All librarians are members of the bargaining unit, except for the directors of the university center libraries. They are designated as management confidential.

Initial relations between SUNYLA and SPA were strained, because in the campaign prior to the election SUNYLA had endorsed a different bargaining agent, SUFT. However, after the conclusion of the contract in July 1971, Robert Granger, SPA president, came to speak to the SUNYLA council. At that meeting he promised to place a librarian on the negotiating committee for the economic reopener, scheduled to begin in January 1972. The council wished to name this member, but Mr. Granger was adamant that this decision would be the union's. He did agree that if the council were to submit three names acceptable to it, one of them would be selected by the union executive board. This was done; and the librarian named was subsequently elected by the negotiating committee to be an academic representative to the negotiating team.

In the negotiations on the reopener, the state maintained that the status of librarians was a noneconomic issue. So far as librarians were concerned, the only positive result of these negotiations came in April 1972 when the New York State Office of Employee Relations (OER) agreed that discussions on librarians' status would be held under the aegis of OER. Librarian members of the group were Anne Commerton, Mary Cassata, Herbert Sorgen, and Evert Volkerz. These discussions began in the summer of 1972 and continued until late January 1973. During this period there was strong cooperation between SPA and librarians.

#### THE ADVENT OF UUP

At this same time negotiations for a

merger of SPA (NEA-NYSUT) and SUFT (AFT) were underway. The merger was ratified by both organizations, and the first meeting of the merged group, United University Professions (UUP), to elect officers was held in Albany in May 1973. Those present will admit that this was a ruthless power struggle complete with vote bargaining, concessions supposedly for unity, and much bitterness. The vote margins, except in cases where it was agreed that "you vote for my side this time and I'll vote for your side next time" were close, and in some cases one vote apart. The result was that former SUFT staff members assumed most positions of leadership and most of the former paid SPA staff resigned. In spite of all the talk of unity, for almost a year the meetings were a split between the old factions. Fortunately, this has changed; and any differences now are on issues, a much healthier situation.

Following the merger, meetings between the librarians and SUNY central administration ceased. There was no push from the union to continue the talks, and SUNYLA alone seemed to have lost some of its drive. Many SUNYLA members felt the organization should place greater emphasis on the more professional aspects of librarianship and leave the status fight to the union. This view was strong, but not so with the members in the Long Island and eastern part of the state who felt there were other organizations to run "how to" sessions and talk about professionalism.

Lawrence DeLucia, UUP president, did name an ad hoc committee on librarians' concerns in 1974; but it was a committee without funding and never given a charge nor asked for a report. What concerned SUNYLA was that UUP had not asked for names of individuals to serve, nor had SUNYLA been consulted in any form. Elizabeth Salzer, SUNYLA president, wrote to President

DeLucia, and the answer she received stated that this matter was strictly union business. Obviously, these were difficult times for the merged union; and many groups were clamoring for something to be done for them. Trying to unify a group so large, so dispersed geographically, and so divergent in job assignments was not easy. At the same time the nonteaching professionals were trying to disaffiliate themselves from the bargaining unit. When the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) finally ruled against disaffiliation, much time and effort had been expended and the negotiations for a new contract seriously delayed.

When negotiations resulted in an agreement for a new two-year contract effective July 1, 1974, librarians were again left out. A group of librarians fought hard against ratification as did some nonteaching professionals and some teaching faculty. Again this group was primarily from the eastern part of the state where living costs were higher and job competition more acute. In spite of the opposition the contract was ratified. The vote was relatively small, but the vote was held after the regular academic semesters had ended. Some librarians resigned from the union and some from SUNYLA, because they felt their organization had not pushed enough. However, most remained to fight again.

The union, when asked about the neglect of librarians, said it could not accomplish everything for everyone and librarians must consider themselves part of the whole and go along with the greatest good for the greatest number. Obviously, we were a real minority. This thought has also been expressed by Dennis Stone in a recent article in *American Libraries*.<sup>7</sup>

The October 1974 issue of the *UUP Voice*, the union periodical, carried an announcement that a committee would meet with central administration to dis-



cuss librarians' needs. The committee was named, but again there was no consultation with SUNYLA. In fact, no one on the committee had served on the previous committee, nor were any members of the earlier committee asked what had happened during those sessions. The chairman of the committee is also the vice-president of SUNYLA, and he stated that he would keep the organization informed of all actions. The council of SUNYLA prepared a resolution affirming that the chairman served on the committee as an individual and not as a representative of SUNYLA. In transmitting the resolution to the union, the SUNYLA president also offered the association's assistance. So far it has not been requested. SUNYLA has established a "Special Committee No. 1" to gather data, though unsolicited, to share with the UUP committee, in this way hoping to interact with the bargaining agent.

#### THE ROLE OF THE UNION

The relationship between SUNYLA and UUP is uneasy. The union wants to be sure it is understood that it is the sole bargaining agent and guards this right jealously. SUNYLA was active in this area before there was a union and obviously is giving up its former role grudgingly. There is little mutual trust. The union leadership strongly endorses unity, loyalty, and discipline. In an editorial in the *UUP Voice*, President DeLucia sums this up:

In order to pursue our legitimate interests, and in order for UUP to be successful, it is necessary for us to develop the ability to discipline ourselves.

The professional staff is accustomed to full, free and sometimes heated debate on all policy questions. The union, of course, supports this principle completely and unhesitatingly in its internal deliberations. However, once full, free and open debate has ended, democratic principles must be imple-

mented. The majority position must prevail, and all of us must commit ourselves to uphold it. . . .

To accomplish the necessary disciplinary structure, we must join forces as one collective body. Despite our numerous differences, we all have one common objective. . . .

When a decision is made, the collective interests will dominate whatever position is taken. . . . We must all learn to discipline ourselves and accept the results of the democratic process.<sup>8</sup>

It would have perhaps been better simply to have stated that a united front is necessary to succeed instead of covering it up as democracy. Does dissent or disagreement stop in the democracy once a vote is taken? If the present meetings bring the results librarians want, probably all will be forgiven. If not, tension will increase. One of the problems in negotiating for higher education is that all are literate and demand to be heard.

#### OTHER VIEWPOINTS

In response to several letters asking for information on the relations between unions and professional organizations, answers were received from Albert Shanker, president, AFT; Belle Zeller, president, Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York (PSC); and William Myrick, Jr., president, Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY).

Mr. Shanker wrote that this "relationship . . . has a very short history and . . . is largely unexplored." He did, however, send a copy of an article by James P. Begin, Rutgers University, on the relationship between faculty senates and collective bargaining agents. Begin concludes that while various patterns are evolving in different institutions collective bargaining "does not necessarily lead to the demise of traditional procedures. Almost entirely absent to date is

the traditional union model in which all faculty input to decision-making is channeled entirely through the bargaining agent."<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Zeller gave some indication of an interactive role between the PSC and LACUNY:

The major goal of the Professional Staff Congress in behalf of our faculty members in library departments has been to integrate them into the mainstream of the instructional staff. Librarians are bona fide teaching faculty members with faculty titles. Any attempt to differentiate them from the teaching faculty we consider discriminatory, and any residue of such differentiation we aspire to eliminate through negotiation. For example, you will see few references to librarians in our contract, because they are Instructors, Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Professors. They do not now enjoy the academic annual leave, but we will bargain for this in the next round of negotiations.

Because of this fundamental policy, our librarian members have declined to elect special representatives (they have been elected as regular officers) or to form a chapter of their own within our union, as other special groups have. They do belong to an organization, the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY), which has functions outside the province of collective bargaining and which communicates and cooperates with our union on matters of common interest.<sup>10</sup>

In his communication William Myrick, Jr., president of LACUNY, stated that relations have not always been quite so amicable as Dr. Zeller indicated. The present harmonious situation resulted from much interaction between the two groups and a great deal of pressure and education from LACUNY. He continued:

We are faced with a constant struggle to maintain the status that we have

achieved. Naturally, there are periods when we feel that the union is not being sufficiently watchful of our interests. Not only is it necessary for us to be eternally watchful to see that the union does not allow our position to be eroded, we must, at the same time as we struggle not to lose ground, struggle also to gain ground.<sup>11</sup>

The dispute between the New York City School Librarians' Association (NYCSLA) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has been documented in *Library Journal* and the *Wilson Library Bulletin*.<sup>12, 13</sup> The Library Media Committee of UFT had called upon the NYCSLA to disband as its activities were divisive. NYCSLA, however, considers some matters are better handled by a professional organization and has accused UFT of undemocratic procedures. One sore point has been that the UFT Library Media Committee has been cochaired since its inception by two appointed chairpersons and that there has never been an election.

Trouble is brewing. It always seems that so far as librarians are concerned they are a very small number within a larger labor force and must be absorbed. It is fine to say librarians will be treated as faculty, but it doesn't just happen because a contract says so. The differences must be identified and understood before the changes can be made. There are jobs to be done both by library associations and unions. The associations are interested in their profession and in more than bread and butter issues. To some extent the associations will be glad to have these issues taken over by the unions. However, anyone who has tried to explain what a librarian is and what a librarian's problems are knows it is not an easy task. It takes constant hammering. Even when you think you have made the point, a little probing shows complete understanding is still lacking. The associations, as collective units, must be the agencies to

give proper information and advice to the unions. They must apply constant pressure and demand to be heard. It would seem LACUNY has been successful in this role. The union, rather than turn to individual librarians who are union members and who may not represent the library community, must turn to the professional association.

Library professional organizations have a fairly long history and are not ready to abrogate what they have been doing for the profession. Unions demand loyalty and are avidly keeping to

themselves what they consider terms and conditions of employment. Unfortunately, the tension building up is hurting the very people it should help. Such jurisdictional battles will not further the status of librarians, but set it back. For librarians to pull out and establish their own union would mean many organizational and legal problems and further delay benefits. The two groups must get together, settle their differences, and put as much emphasis on "one" as on "all."

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