

**CENTRALIZED MULTI-EMPLOYER NEGOTIATIONS
IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF
THE SASKATCHEWAN EXPERIENCE***

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ABSTRACT

This study describes and evaluates the effectiveness of multi-employer bargaining in public education as operationalized in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada. Attention is focused on the major aspects of multi-employer bargaining as the structure developed from local school board-teacher relationships, to multi-employer areawide bargaining, to the current provincewide or centralized bargaining structure. The relative advantages and disadvantages of centralized multi-employer negotiations, as a means of reducing union "whipsawing" tactics, are examined and some observations are made concerning the difficulties associated with the possible establishment of centralized or regional multi-school board bargaining structures in the United States.

Within the United States, collective negotiations in public education predominantly occur at the local level, usually involving a local affiliate of a national and/or state teachers union and local school board representatives.

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Despite the emphasis on localized bargaining relationships in public education, both bargaining parties are concerned with and rely on bargaining outcomes in surrounding and comparable school districts. The interest by teacher bargaining representatives in settlements in neighboring school districts may promote the situation commonly referred to as “whipsawing” in the private sector. Whipsawing occurs when a union settles with one employer and then attempts to use the terms of that settlement to justify an equal or better settlement with another employer.

The potential for union whipsawing tactics in teacher-school board negotiations is real. One factor contributing to the possible use of whipsawing in local educational negotiations is the “built-in coordinating instrument” identified by Pegnetter [1, pp. 21-22]. Although negotiations occur between a local teacher’s representative and school district officials, the local teacher groups are usually affiliated with a state and/or national teachers’ organization that provides staff to either directly participate in negotiations or to provide any needed assistance. These staff members can provide information concerning bargaining demands and outcomes in other school districts. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest a modified form of whipsawing occurs when favorably bargained items in one or more school districts become the bargaining objectives for other affiliates in their local negotiations with school boards.

A variant of this whipsawing tactic, “coercive comparisons,” [1, pp. 21-22] occurs in situations such as fact-finding and arbitration hearings when teacher and/or school board representatives attempt to justify a bargaining position using comparisons with surrounding or similarly situated school districts. Not only are coercive comparisons used to support bargaining positions at impasse hearings, but bargaining breakthroughs in other districts often serve as the parties’ basis for formulating bargaining goals.

One approach adopted by private sector employers to combat whipsawing is to form multi-employer bargaining units. A group of employers who bargain with the same union or affiliates of one national union combine to negotiate a common collective agreement. Multi-employer units reduce the threat of whipsawing by removing or minimizing interemployer comparisons as well as spreading, and usually reducing, financial and time expenditures associated with bargaining. Negotiating expertise can also increase by pooling bargaining skills or retaining a skilled negotiator whose services may not have been previously available to individual employers because of limited financial resources [1, [1, 2, pp. 123-31].

To date the departure from local teacher-school board negotiations to more countywide or statewide centralized multi-employer bargaining has been extremely rare in the United States [1, 2, 3, 4]. Based on the U.S. experience, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of multi-school board bargaining. However, an evaluation of the effectiveness of centralized multi-employer bargaining in public education is possible by analyzing the development and

experience of centralized multi-school board bargaining in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study describes and evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of the centralized multi-employer bargaining structure that exists in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan experience is particularly unique since education negotiations in the province developed in three structurally distinct phases during the past decade. Bargaining in elementary and secondary education evolved from a local school board-teacher union relationship, through a regional or areawide structure involving multi-employer bargaining to the current provincewide bargaining system. This study also discusses Saskatchewan's experience with legislation allowing teachers to strike.

This article is part of a larger study funded by the Saskatchewan Law Foundation evaluating practitioner attitudes toward bargaining legislation in Saskatchewan. The information was gathered by semistructured interviews conducted by the authors with representatives of the school boards, the teacher organization, and provincial government officials. Of the eighty interviews conducted, approximately twenty-five involved collective bargaining in elementary and secondary education. Additional material was collected from both published and unpublished government reports and research manuscripts.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Teachers have had the legal right to bargain collectively since the passage of the Teachers Salary Negotiation Act in 1949 [5]. Similar to bargaining relationships currently found in the United States, bargaining under the Teachers Salary Negotiation Act occurred entirely at the local level between school boards and local affiliates of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF). The most salient result of the local bargaining system was the widespread diversity in negotiated wage rates and related conditions of employment among school districts [6, 7]. This difference was more distinct between the province's urban and rural schools. In terms of educational quality, research has indicated that the variation in local district wage rates created substantial skill mix differentials among the districts [7]. High wage school districts were more capable of attracting and retaining better educated and experienced teachers than the low wage districts. The local bargaining structure under the Teachers Salary Negotiation Act also led to a considerable amount of interdistrict comparisons or whipsawing.

In an effort to reduce the fractionalized nature of bargaining, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA) requested the establishment of a committee to investigate the feasibility of replacing district level bargaining with area- or provincewide bargaining [6]. The Moore Committee recommended that area-

wide bargaining be permitted, but only if both the teachers and trustees agreed to such an arrangement [6]. The recommendations of the Moore Committee were accepted by the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, except that the areawide bargaining structure was made compulsory rather than voluntary as had been suggested by the Committee. Thus, despite protests from the STF, the Teachers Salary Agreement Act of 1968 was passed [8]. In accordance with the act, the 120 local districts in the province were divided into thirteen areas. Each had a teacher committee and a trustee committee, both composed of three persons from each school district in the area, resulting in area committees of up to fifty people [6]. For bargaining purposes, a team of negotiators was selected from each area committee with the objective of attempting to equalize wages and related benefits within that area.

This experience with areawide or regional multi-employer bargaining was short-lived. One factor contributing to its demise was the failure of the structure to eliminate whipsawing by the STF. Rather than entirely drawing comparisons between school districts in one area, interarea comparisons were made. As a result, bargaining flexibility was reduced by the reluctance of an area committee to settle for fear of criticism from other areas that might feel adversely affected by an unfavorable settlement [9]. Secondly, the combination of areawide bargaining with the teachers' statutory right to strike produced some unique problems for trustees who served on their area's bargaining teams. In addition to using areawide strikes when negotiations reached an impasse, the STF also conducted "rotating strikes" within the area. Rotating strikes were economically efficient for the STF, since the incomes of striking teachers were subsidized by those remaining on the job. For the area school board negotiators, the rotating strike tactic was particularly disconcerting because the strike actions were most often directed at the school districts from which the employer bargaining team representatives came. As a result, the pressure generated by strikes were disproportionately borne by trustees serving on the bargaining teams and their districts.

The effectiveness of areawide multi-employer bargaining was further limited by interdistrict conflict within an area, especially between urban and rural school districts. This conflict was fostered by the relative wage advantage enjoyed by urban districts over rural districts within the area as a result of the pre-1968 localized bargaining structure. Thus, barring major wage concessions, the attempt to equalize wage rates within one area was largely at the expense and dissatisfaction of the area's urban districts.

A final factor contributing to the demise of areawide bargaining was the provincial government's wage restraint program. Soon after this bargaining structure was adopted, the government implemented a program of provincewide wage controls, restricting wage increases to 6 per cent. As a result, the flexibility needed by the areawide bargaining committees to reduce differentials within the area was substantially curtailed—much to the dissatisfaction of the STF.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTRALIZED BARGAINING STRUCTURE

While under the areawide system, the STF changed its basic policy and began to pressure the government to restructure bargaining into a single provincewide system. The STF's desire for centralized bargaining was based on its belief that the government was assuming a greater decision-making role in and affecting the outcomes of bargaining by increasing the percentage of educational spending funded directly by the provincial government [6]. The STF also believed that areawide bargaining was being interfered with by the government's policies, limited budget growth, and wage changes. The STF contended that if the government was going to be more active in decisions affecting the economics of bargaining, then its spokesperson should represent those interests at a single centralized bargaining table.

Despite the problems with areawide bargaining, the SSTA remained opposed to centralized bargaining. This opposition was based primarily on the conviction that educational decision making should remain close to the local level, a position that largely reflected the interests of the strong rural representation in the SSTA [9]. The SSTA's opposition to centralization also stemmed from a concern that centralization would significantly increase the STF's bargaining power. If the areawide structure were to be dismantled, the SSTA preferred a return to local bargaining.

In an attempt to appease the STF and SSTA while furthering the government's goals of establishing provincewide salary uniformity and maintaining some control over the increasing share of school district expenditures funded by the government, the Teachers' Collective Bargaining Act was passed by the Legislative Assembly in 1973 [10]. The act replaced the areawide bargaining system with a two-tier bargaining structure. At the first tier, provincewide or master agreements were to be negotiated for such items as salary, longevity pay, group insurance, retirement benefits and contributions, sick leave, and additional items by agreement of both parties. The second tier was to involve local school board-teacher negotiations on specific items not covered in the central agreement. The STF was given the responsibility of representing in central negotiations its 12,000 members who taught in 120 school units. The employers' interests were to be jointly presented by the SSTA and provincial government representatives. The employer bargaining committee was to consist of nine members, four appointed by the SSTA and five government representative from the Department of Education. From the perspective of the SSTA representatives, the major function of the school trustees on the employer bargaining team was to formulate bargaining positions representative of the SSTA's interests, and then to convince both the government and STF representatives of the utility of those positions.

THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Effective contract negotiations require the parties to spend considerable time and effort formulating bargaining positions and strategies. With centralized multi-employer bargaining, the task of position formulation becomes even more complex. The complexity is exacerbated by the necessity for employer and union negotiators to identify and attempt to accommodate the varied interests of the local constituents represented at the central bargaining table.

To develop a bargaining strategy representative of the local school boards' interests, the SSTA establishes a twenty-person collective bargaining committee prior to negotiations. This committee consists of trustees from various geographical regions and school districts. It consults with local trustees throughout the province and formulates a bargaining strategy for the central negotiations. The bargaining committee, in conjunction with the SSTA staff, conducts research to identify the cost and policy implications of various bargaining alternatives. The SSTA's executive committee selects four members from the bargaining committee to represent the SSTA at the central table.

The SSTA bargaining committee usually has some difficulty developing positions that accommodate the diversity of concerns expressed by local school boards. To date, the major difficulty has been that of reducing the conflict of interests between urban and rural school units. Rural districts have supported a more conservative posture regarding economic concessions while the urban districts have been generally inclined to make more liberal concessions. This reflects the latter group's greater ability to pay based on local property wealth. Although urban-rural differences are present during prebargaining coordinating sessions conducted by the SSTA collective bargaining committee, rural school boards' interests predominate because of their majority status within the SSTA. The solid representation of rural interests is not only illustrated in the bargaining strategies adopted by the SSTA but also in the fact that three of the four bargaining team members selected by the SSTA executive committee are rural trustees. As a result, the urban districts have consistently claimed their interests were not adequately represented.

To accommodate the bifurcated nature of the management team, a second prebargaining process is required to enable the SSTA and the government's Department of Education representatives to develop a common bargaining strategy. All nine SSTA and government bargaining team members meet prior to the central negotiations to resolve differences and formulate a unified position. These joint sessions can generate considerable conflict over the optimal economic settlement and the issues relating to management rights. The SSTA has tended to adopt more conservative positions than those advocated by government representatives.

The STF provincial staff is responsible for developing the union's bargaining strategy. To ascertain its memberships' desires, the STF drafts a preliminary negotiating strategy and circulates the position statement to its locals. Regional

meetings are then conducted by the STF staff to elicit membership response and to modify bargaining priorities. Ultimately, a vote of local representatives is taken to measure the support for the bargaining proposals and to determine whether further prebargaining modifications are necessary. The STF also experiences some conflict of interests between the urban and rural membership. However, due to the relative homogeneity of those in the teaching profession and extensive prebargaining input, these differences are often reconciled prior to formal negotiations.

During negotiations, the SSTA bargaining team members apprise the SSTA executive committee of any departures from the bargaining mandate established by the SSTA. Similarly, the Department of Education representatives contact cabinet ministers regarding any necessary changes in bargaining positions not included in their mandate. The central negotiating process tends to be particularly slow due to the complexity of the organizational structure and relationship between bargaining representatives and their constituents. The slowness of negotiations often stems from the aforementioned necessity of SSTA representatives to secure executive committee sanction prior to submitting counterproposals. To the STF's dissatisfaction, employer representatives do not have the capacity to respond quickly to STF proposals and position changes. The bargaining process is also hampered by continued intra-employer bargaining. As with the prebargaining process, SSTA and Department of Education representatives may disagree over how to respond to STF demands. The need for SSTA and government representatives to reach internal consensus before responding to STF's proposals tends to delay reaching a central agreement.

When a tentative agreement is reached, it is subject to ratification by the STF and SSTA membership. STF and SSTA representatives explain the provisions and possible implications of the proposed agreement to their constituents at local and regional meetings. Majority votes by the local school boards and by the STF's entire membership are required for ratification. To date, no tentative agreements have been rejected by either the SSTA or STF membership. This is largely attributable to each party's ability to develop a prebargaining consensus, to remain within its initial or amended guidelines, and to effectively explain the agreement to local constituents.

EVALUATION OF THE SASKATCHEWAN EXPERIENCE

The experience with provincewide bargaining in Saskatchewan has not supported the belief that teacher salary equalization throughout the province results in a more uniform dispersion of degreed and experienced teachers. The research indicates that despite uniform salary levels, urban school districts, which are often wealthier, are better able to attract more qualified and experienced instructors [7]. The principal cause for this imbalance in skill mix

is the variation of financial resources among districts within the province. In general, wealthier districts are better able to afford teachers who command higher salaries as a result of degree status or experience. In contrast, the poorer and often rural districts, because of limited resources, recruit primarily at minimum degree and entry level positions, resulting in continued inequity in the teacher skill mix among school districts despite salary equalization [7].

A second concern, that of eliminating union whipsawing, has been partially successful. At the first tier, where centralized multibargaining occurs, whipsawing has effectively been eliminated as a factor in determining salaries, insurance benefits, and other items negotiated at the provincial level. However, at the second tier, which is typified by local bargaining over conditions of employment not under the jurisdiction of the provincial agreement, union whipsawing is still evident. In local negotiations, the STF still attempts to bargain favorable settlements with less resistant local boards and subsequently apply those agreements to other districts. Although the whipsawing tactic has been limited in use primarily due to the unequal distribution of economic resources among school districts, it is still used with similarly situated school districts within the province.

The existence of a functioning second bargaining tier has reduced the difficulty of negotiating the central multi-employer agreement. One of the inherent dangers associated with multi-employer bargaining is the possibility that intractable local issues may surface at the provincial table. Issues specific to a few school districts may be raised centrally if the local constituencies are vocal or powerful within their respective organizations. Under a single tier multi-employer bargaining structure, the discussion and ultimate contractual resolution of a local problem would result in an uniform constraint applied to all employers regardless of whether the issue concerned their local employment relationships. By maintaining a two-tier structure, the parties can refer problems appropriate for local consideration back to the local level and thus minimize or eliminate the discussion of peculiarly local issues and their possible inclusion in a multi-employer agreement. The two-tier structure has enabled local school trustees to retain control over certain local concerns and local policy issues.

The scope of issues negotiated at the provincial and local levels has created some conflict. The STF feels that provincewide negotiations should be expanded to include a number of issues currently negotiated locally. The STF believes that almost all bargaining issues are essentially interrelated and thus should be discussed as a total package and not fragmented by two tiers of bargaining. Although such an expanded scope of multi-employer negotiations would reduce local union whipsawing, the SSTA has resisted the effort so as to retain an element of local decision making in determining teacher agreements.

Saskatchewan's experience also illustrates two additional problems associated with negotiating central multi-employer agreements. Those problems specifically relate to the lack of flexibility in negotiating and administering an agreement.

Negotiating flexibility is curtailed by the provincial government's concern over the level of the economic settlement. Since the terms of central education agreement are more visible to other public sector unions than the local school unit agreements, the government has sought to establish considerable control over the teacher wage settlement. From the SSTA's perspective, government's concern with the pattern-setting potential of the central agreement is beneficial, since it contributes to financial conservatism. However, the agreement's visibility may serve to reduce the employer's bargaining flexibility, even though it might facilitate the resolution of a contract dispute. Similarly, the STF's concern with the agreement's visibility may exert pressure on the STF to avoid deviating from the terms of other provincewide settlements negotiated with the government. The STF's ability and willingness to make concessions may be limited by contract settlements made elsewhere. As a result of the parties' concern with establishing or maintaining parity with other bargaining units, their flexibility may be curtailed.

Decreased flexibility may also be experienced in the administration of the provincewide agreement. The parties are concerned with the possible ramifications of the resolution of local grievances relating to the provincial agreement for other local units in the multi-employer structure. To minimize the possibility of disparate interpretations of the provincial agreement, the SSTA and government representatives have established a standing committee to interpret local disputes relating to the provincial agreement. Although the grievances are ultimately subject to the negotiated grievance procedures, the SSTA has sought to eliminate resolutions that may result in differential application of the provincial agreement. From this perspective, the reduction of flexibility in resolving contract interpretation disputes may be desirable to insure uniform application of the central agreement and minimize possible interdistrict variations in contract application.

Finally, negotiation of a central multi-employer agreement has other operational repercussions at the local level. Due to the distance between provincial negotiators and their local constituencies, an adequate understanding at the local level of the trade-offs involved in negotiating a centralized agreement may not exist. Local parties may not understand the dynamics of the process that produced the provincial agreement. In Saskatchewan, this problem has been minimized by two key factors. First, the STF and SSTA expend considerable energy explaining the proposed agreement to their local constituents prior to a ratification vote. Secondly, the second tier of bargaining provides local constituents an opportunity for direct involvement in the bargaining process. Therefore, the local parties are more cognizant of the difficulties and trade-offs involved in negotiations. Without a reasonable understanding of the dynamics of the process through local experience and a substantial effort by the provincial negotiators to explain settlements, centralized bargaining would remove the parties from negotiations. The result might be

contract rejections and difficulties in interpreting the multi-employer agreement.

As indicated, negotiation of a multi-employer agreement has the distinct and immediate advantage of eliminating union whipsawing on first-tier issues. Another advantage has been the increased skill and technical expertise of the negotiators. In negotiating issues such as salary schedules and insurance benefits, the participants can take advantage of the economies of scale associated with research and the availability of technical personnel. Rather than being diffused among 120 school units, specialists within each organization are effectively used at a single multi-employer table.

However, it is difficult to determine precisely from the Saskatchewan experience the time savings associated with multi-employer negotiations. Certainly, the amount of time expended by local negotiators is reduced by eliminating the need to research and negotiate major economic issues. However, second-tier bargaining still requires that local school board and union representatives negotiate primarily policy issues that may in fact be more time consuming than major economic issues. Experience to date at the provincial level also indicates that due to coordination problems both prior to and during negotiations, the time involved in negotiating a limited number of economic issues has been great and, as suggested by the negotiators, a problem in multi-employer bargaining.

Surprisingly, one of the major advantages of centralized multi-employer bargaining has been the general absence of strike activity. No provincewide strikes have occurred, and second-tiered job actions have been infrequent. This prospect of a provincewide strike by the STF was a factor in the SSTA's initial reluctance to participate in centralized bargaining.

Several factors contribute to the absence of provincewide strikes. First, the centralized determination of salaries has removed much of the impetus for strikes, since the comparison effect among school districts on major economic issues has been eliminated. Second, conducting a provincewide strike would be administratively and economically difficult for the STF. A provincewide strike by the STF would not have the advantage it enjoyed under the areawide bargaining system where nonstriking locals could supplement the incomes of strikers. As an alternative to provincewide strikes, the STF has once again adopted the tactic of "rotating strikes." However, the use of rotating strikes in response to impasses at the central table has been negligible.

Finally, the absence of provincewide strikes and paucity of local strikes is attributable to the experience both the school trustees and STF representatives have had with bargaining under the threat of a strike since the 1940s. The parties are keenly aware of the relative costs and benefits of strike action. Given the STF's negotiating experience at the local and area levels, it does not approach provincial negotiations with the view of the right to strike as a new tool that needs testing. Similarly, the SSTA and government recognize the strike potential but willingly accept the prospect of a strike when necessary. The parties have a

mutual understanding on the desirability of avoiding strikes. The prospect of strike action if they fail to agree has contributed to a willingness to negotiate in good faith.

APPLICATION OF THE SASKATCHEWAN MODEL TO THE UNITED STATES

Based on an evaluation of the Saskatchewan experience and the current status of teacher-school board negotiations in the United States, the application of a centralized multi-employer bargaining structure for public education in the United States is likely to involve several major operational problems. The difficulty in applying the Saskatchewan model is due to the unique and, to some extent, common aspects of teacher-school board negotiations in Saskatchewan and in the United States.

First, for a multi-employer association to reduce interdistrict whipsawing and produce a true equalizing effect among school districts, the units participating in a statewide or regional multi-employer scheme should be relatively equal in wealth or ability to pay. In Saskatchewan, a centralized agreement may standardize wage rates, but the local economic impact does differ between low and high wealth school districts in the province. Furthermore, disparities in school district resources create considerable difficulties in determining the bargaining objectives of the multi-employer association. Conflict may occur between low and high wealth districts concerning the acceptability of costs associated with various settlements. If the wealthy districts prevail in establishing a bargaining strategy, the less wealthy districts are likely to be adversely affected by the economic terms of a multi-employer settlement. Should the low wealth districts prevail in defining the objectives, the wealthier districts may feel constrained and the union members dissatisfied. A state resource equalization formula that promotes economic parity between the districts in a multi-employer association would minimize the possible disparate economic impact. Unfortunately, education finance literature and experience to date indicate that complete or extensive equalization is difficult to achieve. Even equal per pupil wealth among districts would not likely reduce inherent disparities in an uniform agreement because of school district variations in size and subsequent economies of scale.

A second concern with a multi-employer bargaining association in the United States relates to increased complexity in bargaining. The bargaining process is likely to become more complex as state government representatives become involved. Since settlements may affect total operating costs of a school district, state agencies are likely to become more active participants in determining bargaining objectives and outcomes, particularly if the economic settlement could result in pressure by districts for increased state funding. Thus, formulation of objectives would not only be subject to interdistrict

debate but also to discussion between the state government, which often provides major funding, and the multi-employer association. Such intergovernmental debate and position formulation was identified by Saskatchewan school trustees as a major difficulty in operationalizing a multi-employer or centralized bargaining structure since the objectives of local boards and the provincial government often conflicted. In the United States, it appears that the economic concerns of state governments would encourage the appropriate state agencies to become more involved in formulating bargaining objectives. Thus, local influence may be diminished by participation in a multi-employer association as well as by state government intervention.

The effectiveness of multi-employer and centralized bargaining in the U.S. in reducing union whipsawing tactics depends on the comprehensiveness of the employer associations. The Saskatchewan situation is peculiar, since the current provincewide bargaining structure was mandated by law and includes all districts. If state legislatures were to establish either a statewide bargaining structure for public education or a regional bargaining structure, comparable to the earlier areawide system in Saskatchewan, a number of problems would likely result. First, a difficult transitional period could be expected as the parties attempt to frame an initial agreement acceptable to more school districts and local teacher unions. Considerable ingenuity would be required to equalize differences among existing district-level contract provisions resulting from previous localized bargaining experiences. Either some local districts would have to reduce the economic and noneconomic benefits to achieve a common multi-employer contract, or other districts would have to substantially increase the benefits to achieve parity. The prospect of increasing benefits resulting from legislatively mandate centralized or regional bargaining efforts would probably be difficult and unpopular for school boards capable of negotiating lower cost settlements at the local level. Teacher locals in high benefit districts would probably oppose a decrease or a slower growth rate in their compensation levels resulting from a single statewide or regional agreement. Initial difficulties associated with a legislatively mandated structure would be affected by the existing diversity among contract provisions in the school districts to be included in a common agreement. This problem probably would not only be reflected in difficulties during the bargaining process but also in contract ratification by both bargaining parties.

Should a voluntary or nonmandated multi-employer bargaining association develop in the United States, a number of problems are still likely to emerge. Most notably, differences among districts' ability to pay and the subsequent economic impact of a common agreement could generate interemployer conflict over bargaining positions and the acceptability of proposed settlements. Even if economic equality existed among districts, some school districts, at the insistence of board members and/or the local teacher union, might prefer to negotiate independently. Such preference may result from either the district's

favorable economic position and a fear of decreased bargaining flexibility in a multi-employer group or the possibility of a costlier economic settlement. In either case, it is possible that the desire for inclusion or exclusion in the multi-employer association may differ between the local school board and the union. Considerable conflict may be generated at the local level regarding whether a district should participate in the employer association.

The voluntary evolution of either a state or regional multi-employer bargaining structure presents another difficulty, since the goal of eliminating union whipsawing may not be achieved. Whipsawing tactics may develop between aligned and nonaligned districts or between multi-employer associations. Even Saskatchewan's single, multi-employer structure does not prevent interprovincial comparisons. In effect, the scope of the comparison may expand.

Finally, a major difficulty in establishing either mandated or voluntary multi-employer associations in the United States relates to union representation. In Saskatchewan, the STF is the only teacher union in the province. However, in many states both the AFT and NEA have representational rights and, in some locations, independent teacher locals exist. Thus, mandated or voluntary regional or statewide multi-employer negotiations would present some interesting and potentially difficult problems.

If a statewide or regional bargaining structure were established, the bargaining process would not only be complicated by the necessity to develop a single employer objective but also by considerable pre-bargaining coordination and possible conflict among various nationally affiliated or independent teacher unions participating in the multi-employer negotiations. In two noneducation bargaining relationships in Saskatchewan's health services industry where centralized bargaining occurs between two or more unions representing similar occupations but with different employers, the experience has indicated major interunion conflicts that have complicated the bargaining process. As a result, multi-employer and multi-union bargaining structures have been abandoned and replaced by separate multi-employer bargaining with locals of the same affiliation. If a multi-employer structure with separate union organizations is more desirable to avoid interunion conflicts during the bargaining process, then a possible second major difficulty, interunion rivalries regarding the terms and conditions of multi-employer contracts, should be considered. Since the multi-employer contracts would obviously be visible to teachers, each union may attempt to outperform the other unions, possibly at the employer's expense. But even in the absence of a desire to outperform each other, the presence of multi-employer associations for individual affiliated or independent unions may again lead to whipsawing among the multi-employer associations within a state. This issue of multi-union representation in public education and other items of employment relationships in the public sector seem to present some major obstacles for the establishment of effective multi-employer bargaining structures in the United States.

CONCLUSION

The above issues represent some of the major difficulties associated with applying and operationalizing a multi-employer bargaining scheme as currently practiced in Saskatchewan to negotiations in public education in the United States. These difficulties may suggest some of the major reasons why multi-employer bargaining has not been legislatively mandated or why the voluntary use of multi-employer bargaining has been rather limited in the United States. If statewide multi-employer bargaining structures are established, it is clear from the Saskatchewan experience that a gradual development or evolution from the local to multi-employer bargaining is desirable. In particular, the effectiveness of centralized bargaining in Saskatchewan appears to have been influenced by the short-term experimentation with areawide bargaining. It also seems that problems associated with multi-employer bargaining structures are likely to surface at the onset of such structures. Thus, if the parties could overcome these substantial obstacles present in the early stages, multi-employer bargaining could possibly have a future in the United States.

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