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Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union in Boston

Kathleen Murphey

Educational and labor historians are beginning to uncover the complex historical portrait of teachers as a labor force: their identities, their working conditions, and their consciousness of themselves as workers and professionals.¹

The unionization of teachers, through only one aspect of that history, proves to be a particularly rich one for adding to our knowledge of teachers' past work lives. Through collective action, teachers sought to be empowered and to find a voice in educational decision-making. Finding a voice, however, meant having a united, collective identity, which was often difficult to achieve, since working conditions, pay, and status differed for various groups of teachers. Those groupings, usually defined by gender and grade-level, encouraged teachers' allegiance to a particular group of colleagues, rather than to all of their peers.

The history of organizing Boston's teachers since the second decade of this century contributes to the historical portrait of division among teachers. The Boston Teachers Union, Local No. 66 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), affiliated with the AFL-CIO, formed in 1965, but only after several conditions had become more equal for all segments of the teacher workforce, and after identities built up around the segments had

1. See, for instance, Richard J. Altenbaugh, The Teacher's Voice: A Social History of Teaching in Twentieth-Century America (Washington, D.C., 1992); Larry Cuban, How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890-1980 (New York, 1984); Jurgen Herbst, And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture (Madison, Wisconsin, 1989); Polly Welts Kaufman, Women Teachers on the Frontier (New Haven, 1984); Marjorie Murphy, Blackboard Unions: the AFT and the LIEA, 1900-1980 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991); and Donald Warren, ed., American Teachers, Histories of a Profession at Work (New York, 1989).

diminished.² Differing conditions based on gender proved to be particularly divisive. Such conditions were rooted in historically determined and perpetuated inequities for men and women teachers at the workplace, and were supported by ideology about the role of men and women in the family and at work. Exploring the gender theme, especially the early organizing attempts around gender and grade-level divisions, the issue of equal pay for men and women, and the married-teacher ban for women, brings focus to the historical conditions of teaching, to how teachers worked to change those conditions, and to how changed conditions led to changes in teachers' consciousness of themselves as a workforce.

In recent historical research about various aspects of the teaching profession, gender has often emerged as a theme. The works of Jurgen Herbst and Donald Warren show, for example, that training, power in the profession, labor force participation, career patterns, and ideology about the role of the teacher, have varied greatly for male and female teachers, and have changed over time.³

Gender had also been a factor in the development of teachers' unions. Marjorie Murphy, in her recent comprehensive overview of the history of the AFT and the National Education Association (NEA), explores the impact of gender divisions on teachers' organizational strategies and effectiveness, as well as the influence of larger social movements, such as the women's suffrage movement and feminism, on women teachers' workplace politics. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir also point to the importance of gender in the politics and effectiveness of teacher

2. Newspaper accounts, union correspondence and documents, and School Committee proceedings contribute to this narrative. The papers of the Boston Teachers Union, Local No. 66 of the AFT, as well as the many smaller AFT locals that were part of its early history, are housed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs (A.L.U.A.), at the Walter P. Reuther Library on the campus of Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

3. Herbst, And Sadly Teach; Warren, ed., American Teachers. Especially relevant selections from Warren include John L. Rury, "Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," pp. 9-48; Susan B. Carter, "Incentives and Rewards to Teaching," pp. 49-62; James W. Fraser, "Agents of Democracy: Urban Elementary-School Teachers and the Conditions of Teaching," pp. 118-156; David F. Labaree, "Career Ladders and the Early Public High School Teacher: A Study of Inequality and Opportunity," pp. 157-189; and Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family, and Career in American Educational History," pp. 293-343.

organizing in the early decades of this century.⁴ Historical scholarship on teachers' unions in other countries echoes these same themes.⁵

According to labor market segmentation theory, employers often funnel workers with particular characteristics, such as race, gender, or ethnic background into specific areas of work.⁶ The funneling promotes worker's loyalties to workers with the same characteristics, but destroys their solidarity with other workers at their workplace and in the total labor force. Segmentation theory proves to be a useful tool for analyzing the slow growth of the teachers' union movement in Boston. The teacher workforce in Boston, like in other cities in the United States, was historically segmented by gender and academic level, with each segment having its own history, training, skills, pay scale, and status. That tended to promote strong group loyalties within each segment, loyalties that were difficult for the teachers' union movement to overcome.

Some argue that organizing by male teachers, either in reaction to the gains of female teachers or to poor working conditions, were the driving force behind unionization.⁷ To focus exclusively on the numbers of men and women in various organizations, or on the numbers who went on strike at a given time, distorts the complexity of the change that occurred in both

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4. Murphy, in Blackboard Unions, presents a thorough analysis of many factors that determined the direction of teacher union organizing, focussing, however, on three major impeding factors: the ideology of professionalism, recurrent red-baiting, and recurrent fiscal crisis; Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal (Berkeley, Calif., 1985), pp. 108 and 110.
5. Wayne J. Urban includes an excellent overview of work on teacher unionism abroad, in "New Directions in the Historical Study of Teacher Unionism," paper presented to Division F, American Educational Research Association, March, 1989.
6. Contributions to the theory of labor market segmentation include David M. Gordon, Richard C. Edwards, and Michael Reich, "Labor Market Segmentation in American Capitalism," paper presented at the Conference on Labor Market Segmentation, Harvard University, March 16 and 17, 1973; see also Reich, Gordon, and Edwards, "A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," American Economic Review, LXIII (May, 1973): 359-384, and Gordon, Edwards, and Reich, Segmental Work, Divided Workers (Cambridge, England, 1982).
7. Stephen Cole, in The Unionization of Teachers: A Case Study of the UFT (New York, 1969); and Ronald G. Corwin, in Militant Professionalism: A Study of Organizational Conflict in High Schools (New York, 1970).

working conditions and teacher consciousness. Research on Boston suggests that gender divisions played a large role in how teachers were able to organize themselves, and in the issues they were able to organize around. But for the unionization of all teachers to occur, teachers had to resolve such divisions. Unionization, therefore, cannot be attributed to the special efforts of a particular gendered segment.

Gender issues were not alone in slowing the growth of the teachers' union movement in Boston. In both 1919 and the late 1930s, Boston teachers formed locals of the AFT, with broad jurisdictions, i.e., with both male and female teachers from Boston as well as its suburbs, from both public and private schools, and from all academic levels. Both locals were shunned by most of the Boston classroom teachers, because of their broad jurisdictions as well as their reputed left-leaning politics. The issue of radicalism and the locals' positions on national and international political issues, which were not directly related to educational issues, alienated most of Boston's classroom teachers. Even those classroom teachers who favored unionization envisioned it only with their own colleagues, not with all teachers in and around Boston, nor with teachers at all academic levels. Though the majority of Boston's teachers twice rejected the option of a broadly-based, more political union, for many years fears of such a union kept many of Boston's classroom teachers distanced from union activity.

Actions of the School Committee to defeat union organizing, the fiscal conditions of the city, and the general political attitude toward unionization, also affected teachers' efforts to organize a union in Boston. In spite of these factors, however, during the periods following the teachers' rejection of a more politically-oriented union, in 1919 and the 1940s, respectively, gender issues dominated workplace politics.

The educational workforce in the United States has always been segmented by gender. Until the 1840s, men usually taught in the few high schools and grammar and writing schools, while neighborhood women taught most of the young children in "Dame Schools" which were run out of their homes. In the 1840s, many of the Dame Schools were incorporated into the new Common Schools. Thereafter, female teachers, who were paid about a third of what male teachers were paid, filled the ranks of the Common Schools. In contrast, male teachers had often attended college, and some planned on a lifetime career in teaching. Though the men earned more than the women, the pay

was still modest, but the position had prestige, similar to that of ministers. In addition, the men who tired of teaching had other options.⁸

Compared to men, women had far fewer opportunities for paid work in the 1840s. Those who entered the labor force in the areas then available to women, domestic work, factory work, and teaching, usually did so in the years before they married, to help support their parents or siblings. Teaching had the highest status, though factory work paid more until later in the century. Female teachers in most cities were not allowed to teach after marriage, a School Committee policy that did not change in Boston until the 1950s, a policy which guaranteed a high turnover among female teachers, and which helped to justify the low pay of allegedly "uncommitted" women teachers.

In the course of the nineteenth century, female teachers began to receive their education in the new normal schools, which male teachers viewed as an inferior route to a teaching career. Men continued to teach the most advanced classes, and as schools increased in size, men were to become the heads of schools.

Women, nonetheless, continued to enter teaching at a far faster rate than did men, no doubt at least partially due to the fact that they were less expensive for school committees to hire, especially at a time when the school systems were rapidly expanding. At the end of the Civil War, women comprised at least one-half of all the teachers and most of the elementary teachers; by the turn of the century, women comprised about eighty-five percent of the classroom teachers, but they still received one-third the pay of the male teachers, and they were virtually excluded from educational associations. Lack of professional representation for women began to change at that time, however, when organizations of female classroom teachers, such as the Chicago Teachers Federation, led by Margaret Haley, challenged women's exclusion from the NEA, and when they

8. This overview of the history of the educational workforce draws on the following sources: Richard M. Bernard and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Female School Teacher in Ante-Bellum Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History*, X (Spring, 1977): 332-345; Adam M. Drayer, *The Teacher in a Democratic Society* (Columbus, Ohio, 1970); Willard S. Elsbree, *The American Teacher* (New York, 1939); Herbst, *And Sadly Teach*; Myron Lieberman, *Education as a Profession: American Schoolmen in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1975); David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); and Warren, ed., *American Teachers*.

formed their own women teachers' organizations, affiliated with organized labor.⁹

At the turn of the century, Boston's female teachers, unlike their sisters in Chicago, did not challenge the focus of the NEA, or turn for support to organized labor. In the tradition of the "Boston Masters," groups of teachers formed associations or clubs for social as well as professional purposes, such as for presenting requests for raises to the School Committee. The groups formed around grade-level and/or subject matter; the high school clubs were often limited either to men or women. The efforts of these diverse groups of teachers were usually not coordinated with one another. Each group, independent of the others and at different times of the year, presented its wage requests to the School Committee. Boston's teachers' clubs did, however, work together for a few years in the early twentieth century, to develop a pension system.¹⁰

During the second decade of the century, teachers gradually made inroads toward developing their power, by working successfully to elect School Committee members who supported their interests. Since women teachers often supported or worked actively with women's suffrage organizations, they also gained the support of suffrage leaders. In 1918, inspired by the work of Margaret Haley and Ella Flagg Young in Chicago, Boston's teachers pushed for and won the election of Teachers' Councils, to give teachers a voice in school policy. Early that same year, the teachers got raises, also as a consequence of their militancy, and by June of 1918 the newsletter of the Boston Teachers' Club, representing 1,300 teachers from all grade-levels, was carrying pieces on the importance of a teachers' union. The teachers continued to push for additional pay increases, since

9. For accounts of these organizations, see, for example, James Earl Clarke, "The American Federation of Teachers: Origins and History from 1870 to 1952," Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1966; Cherry Wedgewood Collins, "Schoolmen, Schoolma'ams and School Boards: The Struggle for Power in Urban School Systems in the Progressive Era," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1976; David Hogan, Class and Reform: School and Society in Chicago, 1880-1930 (Philadelphia, 1985); Grace Charlotte Strachan, Equal Pay for Equal Work: The Story of the Struggle for Justice being made by the Women Teachers of the City of New York (New York, 1920).

10. Martha E. O'Neil, "Local No. 66: Looking Backward," Boston Union Teacher, in six parts, January to June, 1975.

wages were still low, at a time when the cost of living was subject to war-induced inflation.¹¹

The Boston Teachers' Club, which was clearly taking an ever more militant and effective role among Boston's teachers, was by 1919 one of Boston's two largest teacher organizations. The other large club, with roughly two thousand members, was the Elementary Teachers' Club. At that time, there were twenty-seven different teachers' clubs in Boston, often with overlapping membership, for a teaching force of about three thousand.¹²

Boston's teachers were not alone in their perception of low pay and eroding working conditions. In the nineteenth century, Boston's teachers had enjoyed a national reputation for excellence and high standards, but as the once sedate and wealthy New England seaport was transformed into a large urban center, Massachusetts, the birthplace of the Common School in the 1840s, no longer stood at the forefront of American education. As industry moved out of Massachusetts and into new industrial centers, Boston's schools lost some of their earlier innovative dynamism. Massachusetts' new governor, Calvin Coolidge, worried about the Boston schools' loss of reputation. The Boston School Committee, concerned about attracting and retaining good teachers, admitted the justice of the teachers' claim for increased compensation.¹³

The teacher pay scale at that time also differentiated among teachers by gender and grade-level, as it had historically; at all levels, men, or "Masters," were paid more than women, or "Assistants," and high school teachers more than elementary. Any male teacher in the system started with a salary over twice that of the female elementary school teachers (\$1,476 for men, and \$696 for women), who comprised over half of Boston's three thousand

11. James W. Fraser, "Agents of Democracy," and "Who Were the Progressive Educators Anyway? A Case Study of the Progressive Education Movement in Boston, 1905-1925," Educational Foundations II (Spring, 1988): 14-30.

12. O'Neil, "Looking Backward."

13. For an overview of the changes in teachers' salaries over the years, see the Salary Schedules printed in the Proceedings of the School Committee, City of Boston, 1900-1919. For Governor Coolidge's views, see Boston Evening Transcript, January 2, 1919, p. 13. Comments from the School Committee are in Documents of the School Committee of the City of Boston for the Year 1919, School Document No. 18, "Annual Report of the School Committee, City of Boston, 1918."

teachers. The yearly increment for men was \$144; for women \$96.14.¹⁴ It was under such conditions that the teachers' union movement finally took hold in Boston, though not through the leadership of Boston's classroom teachers.

In the early months of 1919, a group of men who were associated with the Boston Labor College, which had been organized under the auspices of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), formed the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, Local No. 66 of the AFT, which was also affiliated with the AFL. Few of its nineteen original members were classroom teachers in Boston's public schools. Most taught at the university level, some taught in private schools, some taught outside of Boston, and several were allegedly socialists.¹⁵

The press and some of Boston's classroom teachers immediately charged that the local was too radical. The Greater Boston Federation of Teachers was closer in spirit to the reform or socialist Local No. 5 in New York City, than to that of the more conservative local in Chicago, whose leaders controlled the AFT in 1919. The AFT national leaders tried to discourage the efforts of the new local. While never directly critical of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, they unofficially and secretly worked to organize groups of Boston's classroom teachers, based on workplace divisions by gender and grade-level. At that time the AFT leaders encouraged separate locals.

In May of 1919, Charles Stillman, then the president of the AFT, informed the members of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers that he did not think they had sufficient support to form a local which would include all the teachers in the Greater Boston area. He argued that those teachers who preferred a local which only included Boston teachers, or only men, or only women, or only teachers at a certain grade-level, would be

14. Proceedings of the School Committee, City of Boston, November 10, 1919, pp. 211-216.

15. O'Neill, Looking Backward; undated newspaper article, in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 file, Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, series VI, Box 12, in ALUA; Preliminary announcement of the Trade Union College, Spring term, 1919, in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 GBFT file, ALUA. The Boston Trade Union College, also called the Boston Labor College, was founded on February 2, 1919. It was officially affiliated with the AFL, and supported by the Boston Central Labor Union, the city-wide organization for AFL unions.

prohibited from forming such locals, for AFT policy did not allow overlapping jurisdictions of locals in any city.¹⁶

Stillman noted teachers' successful organizing of several small locals in Washington D.C., Chicago, and St. Paul. He was convinced that the one big local in New York City, Local No. 5, had not attracted as many teachers as several small locals could have:

No. 5 is overwhelmingly Jewish and socialist, and prejudice runs so high in New York City that our field is practically limited to teachers of that race and political persuasion. Meanwhile we have no machinery for breaking down these vicious prejudices.¹⁷

Stillman felt that divisions among teachers could be erased by small locals working together:

If at the outset we had started with subdivided jurisdictions, we would have locals of various racial, religious and political complexions, working together, and ironing out differences and eliminating prejudices in the salutary process of working together.¹⁸

While the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers debated organizing strategies with leaders of the AFT, both unionism and the charges of radicalism had become heated issues for Boston's classroom teachers. Newspapers reported that the Boston Schoolmaster's Club voted to study the union question, for some members who represented themselves as "submasters," were particularly eager to consider unionization.¹⁹

16. Charles B. Stillman to George Nasmyth, May 5, 1919; Charles B. Stillman to Mabel Gillespie, May 5, 1919, both in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 GBFT file, ALUA.

17. Stillman to Nasmyth, May 5, 1919.

18. Ibid.

19. Boston Post, May 16, 1919, p. 14.

The two largest teachers' clubs also debated the union question, but they came to different conclusions. The Elementary Teacher's Club feared unionization because of the alleged radicalism of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers; the Boston Teachers' Club, which had been the most militant of Boston's teachers' clubs, favored unionization, though it envisioned a union of Boston classroom teachers which would be separate from the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers. However, when the Boston Teachers' Club held a meeting of all teachers, to promote the cause of unionization, a speaker from the Teachers-Principals Association effectively countered many of their arguments, thereby angering club members. The following day, the Boston Elementary School Teachers' Club announced the formation of one big, non-union, federation of all teacher groups, including men and women and elementary and secondary teachers, as a way to counter the efforts of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers. According to a local newspaper:

The unanimous voice of the meeting was for a federation of all the teachers and teachers' clubs of the city into one great union and later, if desired, the union to become affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, through a separate charter, but not through either Local 66 or the American Federation of Teachers.²⁰

At the same time, and also in reaction to the union's organizing drive, some male teachers and administrators formed the Boston Schoolmen's Economic Association.²¹

Given the adverse publicity of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, the poor response to their organizational efforts, and the anti-union organizing among Boston's teachers, the leaders of the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers finally agreed with Stillman that they did not have the backing of Boston's teachers. They reluctantly decided to withdraw their charter application, if that would help achieve unionization. With

20. Boston Traveler, May 23, 1919, p. 4.

21. Boston Post, May 17, 1919, p. 9; May 20, 1919, p. 4; May 22, 1919, p. 6; May 23, 1919, p. 1; and May 29, 1919, p. 7; Boston Traveler, May 22, 1919, p. 11; May 23, 1919, p. 4. John A. Marsh to Charles B. Stillman, June 4, 1919, in AFT Papers, Local No. 100 file, Boston Federation of Men Teachers (Series VI, Box 16), ALUA.

Stillman's support, three new AFT locals were then chartered: the Union of Boston High School Women Teachers, Local No. 85; the Union of Boston Women Teachers (Elementary), Local No. 88; and the Boston Federation of Men Teachers, Local No. 100. The outspoken leaders of the Boston Teachers' Club became the new leaders of Local No. 88.²²

Thus, by the end of May of 1919, the original organizing drive of AFT Local No. 66 had failed, but it had spawned several new teachers' organizations: a united federation of Boston teachers' clubs, the Boston Schoolmen's Economic Association, and three AFT locals based on gender and grade-level divisions. In general, the elementary school teachers, the least-paid and least politically powerful teachers, and the Masters, the highest paid and most politically powerful teachers, actively opposed unionization. The Masters feared losing their privileged position; the elementary school teachers had no privileges to lose, relative to other teachers, though many feared that association with a labor organization would cost them their jobs. A small group of teachers that cut across gender and grade-level divisions favored unionization, but only if they could base their organizations on such divisions.

In June of 1919, the AFL's newly-formed Boston Police Union also received its charter as an AFL union. It went on strike in early September of 1919, which caused riots in Boston, alienated the AFL, cost the police their jobs, and brought serious new hurdles to labor union organizing throughout the country, particularly to public employee unions. Alongside reports of the striking police, however, the Boston newspapers continued to report abysmal conditions in Boston's schools.

Boston's teachers, organized and unorganized, asked for a \$600 across-the-board raise in the fall of 1919, even though some female high school teachers would have preferred to have pushed for greater increases for women.²³ The School Committee proposed a \$384 graded increase: \$384 for female teachers, and \$288 for male teachers. That is precisely the amount that the

 22. Harry (Henry) Dana to Charles B. Stillman, May 10, 1919, in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 GBFT file, ALUA; Local No. 85 charter application, May 27, 1919, in AFT Papers, Local No. 85 file, Union of Boston High School Women Teachers (Series VI, Box 14), ALUA; AFT Sec.-Treas. George Davis to Ruth Peters, March 19, 1936, in AFT Papers, Local No. 441 file, Boston Federation of Teachers (Series IV, Box 12), ALUA.

23. O'Neil, "Looking Backward."

teachers finally won. Soon after the pay increases were announced, in November of 1919, the graded increases touched off a movement by female high school teachers for equal pay.²⁴ It also touched off strong, though varied, reactions among the fledgling AFT locals.

The men in Local No. 100, the Boston Federation of Men Teachers, were immediately convinced that the School Committee would eventually favor the women, at their expense.

...the men teachers know that the Boston School Committee will respond to a vigorous campaign on these lines by giving only light increases to the men and much larger ones to the women. We do not begrudge the women what they get but all the men feel that our niggardly increases during the last few years are due to the fact that the School Committee feels sooner or later they must advance the women teachers to the same salaries as ourselves.²⁵

By September of 1920, the men's local voted to dissolve itself, mainly because of the School Committee's granting of "particularly all that the women teachers have asked with almost entire disregard of the economic necessities of the men," as well as the equal pay platforms of both the AFT and the AFL, which placed teaching for men "among the impossible callings."²⁶ The secretary of the local explained:

Looked at from one direction I can see the justice of "equal pay"; looked at from the standpoint of social obligation it leaves the man in a terrible dilemma, either consigning his family to a lower scale of living than the women fellow-teachers among whom he works or withdrawing from the

24. H. P. McLaughlin to F. G. Stecker, January 27, 1920, in AFT Papers, Local No. 100 file, ALUA.

25. Ibid.

26. John A. Marsh to F. G. Stecker, September 27, 1920, in AFT Papers, Local No. 100 file, ALUA.

profession to something else where he can earn a man's wage with men.²⁷

The AFT accepted the returned charter, but defended the cause of equal pay, because teacher-training was equally expensive for men and women, and working conditions were the same. Although fewer men entered teaching, they should not be artificially induced by a higher salary, argued the AFT, for such inducements simply maintained low standards of admittance. If minimum standards were raised, and salaries also, more good male teachers would enter the profession, and more good female teachers, too. The problem was one of educating the public to the need for better schools and higher qualifications for teachers:

To ask that men receive higher salaries is to accept standards as they are without protest To keep a small percentage of men by artificial inducement is to give the public an opiate from which it may take years to recover.²⁸

Although the AFT lost the men's local, it anticipated, incorrectly, that women would look to it in even greater numbers to resolve the equal pay issue.²⁹ Instead, after the pay increase in November of 1919, women withdrew their membership from the other two locals, the Union of Boston High School Women Teachers, and the Union of Boston Women Teachers (Elementary).³⁰ In the fall of 1920, the elementary teachers union ceased supporting the equal pay issue, reasoning that only high school women would benefit from equal pay, for only the female high school teachers had male colleagues to be equal with.³¹ Thereafter, the high school women's union struggled alone in an

27. *Ibid.*

28. F. G. Stecker to John A. Marsh, October 7, 1920, in AFT papers, Local No. 100 file, ALUA.

29. F. G. Stecker to Margaret C. Cotter, November 10, 1920, in AFT Papers, Local No. 85 file, ALUA.

30. Margaret C. Cotter to F. G. Stecker, October 12, 1920, in AFT Papers, Local No. 85 file, ALUA.

31. Cotter to Stecker, November 26, 1920, in AFT papers, Local No. 85 file, ALUA.

ever-worsening climate for labor organizing. A \$600 increase for all teachers in the spring of 1921 fostered more resignations, for teachers saw even less need to join a labor organization.³²

Thus, the issue of equal pay, which was, according to AFT leaders, to raise standards for all teachers, had offended the male high school teachers and the female elementary school teachers, leaving only the original supporters, the female high school teachers, to fight for the issue and carry the banner of teacher unionism in Boston. The high school women's local maintained itself until 1925, when, with a membership of fourteen out of four thousand teachers, it, too, surrendered its charter.

The idea of organizing several small locals based on historically-determined divisions, by gender and grade-level, backfired during this period of teacher organizing in Boston. While its purpose was to build on the loyalties of teachers to their various divisions of the workforce, and thereby to attract more teachers to individual locals, it helped to underscore those divisions among teachers, as did the equal pay issue.

Teachers' potential power through affiliation with organized labor was far overshadowed during this early period by most teachers' fears of joining a radical group, a fear that was exploited by teachers and others who were opposed to unionization. Some teachers also feared losing privileges relative to other teachers, a fear that the School Committee exploited by giving higher raises to women. Thus, teachers were divided due to fear of labor affiliation, as well as to their historically-determined workplace divisions and unequal working conditions.

Perhaps the most significant political movement among teachers during this early period was the leadership role of many female teachers and the changing politics of the male teachers. The historically-united conservative stance of male teachers was changing, as their privileges began to erode. A few had joined the original AFT local, the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, and still others had formed the Boston Schoolmen's Economic Association, as a counter to unionization. Movement among male teachers would continue in the future, as conditions for teachers changed. The leadership role of women in teachers' unionism would also continue.

During this early period of organizing, gender was a significant and divisive factor in the organizational strategies and

32. Cotter to Stecker, June 2, 1921, in AFT Papers, Local No. 85 file, ALUA.

issues of the AFT. Loyalty to gender divisions held back unionization. The issue of equal pay alienated men, and some women, too, leading directly to the demise of two of the small locals. The hurdles of gender, rooted as they were in the composition of the workforce, and the differentiated rewards for segments of the workforce, were too great to overcome.

Even though twenty-five years had passed since the equal pay issue had been raised in the 1920s, and all the major actors had changed, the script in the 1940s was strikingly similar. Changes in a few variables, however, brought about equal pay for men and women teachers at the same grade-level.

In 1936, a group of teachers from Greater Boston chartered Local No. 441 of the AFT, the Boston Federation of Teachers. This group, like the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, Local No. 66, which had formed briefly in 1919, had a broad jurisdiction, with teachers from all levels of schooling, both men and women, from a variety of types of schools, and from several communities. Like the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers, it also appeared to be involved with issues of the Left, and possibly with the Communist Party, as it took on politically-charged issues, such as the Massachusetts loyalty oath for teachers and a highly publicized case of academic freedom. In the early 1940s, the Boston Federation of Teachers also addressed the married-teacher ban (discussed below), but it did not address the bread-and-butter issues of classroom teachers, according to critics within its own ranks, who were classroom teachers in Boston.

In October of 1944, the local's internal critics, mainly female high school teachers, succeeded in revoking the charter of Local No. 441, with the help of the AFT. In November of 1945, the critics chartered a new AFT local, Local No. 66, the Boston Teachers Union.³³ Thus, like in the earlier period of teachers' union organizing in Boston, a politicized, left-leaning local initiated union organizing, but was eventually eased out through the combined efforts of the national leaders of the AFT, and pro-union but less politicized classroom teachers. While the new Local, No. 66, consisted almost entirely of female high school teachers, it was open to all of Boston's classroom teachers, for the

33. The Boston Teachers' Union, Local Number 66, took the number of the first AFT local in Boston, but not its name. The new local had a small but steady membership throughout the 1940s and 1950s, until it began its rapid growth in the early 1960s. It won the collective bargaining election in 1965, and currently represents Boston's teachers.

AFT no longer supported a policy of separate locals based on gender and grade-level divisions. Also, like in the earlier period, once the perceived radical union was ousted, the issue of gender became a major focus.

Soon after the chartering of the Boston Teachers Union, a coalition of women from the various teachers clubs, a total of forty-nine at that time, launched a drive for equal pay. The drive failed, but most of the women were eventually enticed into another new teachers' organization, the Boston Teachers Alliance. This non-union organization, for both male and female teachers, had formed in the early months of 1946, after some men's groups published a newspaper voicing complaints about low teacher morale in the schools, and about interference with discipline problems by administrators. The men's tempers were further fired up by the provocative reactions of one member of the School Committee. The initiative to form the Alliance followed immediately after a highly-emotional confrontation with that school committeeman.³⁴

The fact that the high school men had developed a publicly-antagonistic relationship with a school committeeman signaled a change again, like in the twenties, from the men's conservative stance in teacher politics. From that point in the 1940s, men began to take active roles in various teachers' organizations, including the Boston Teachers Union.

To the Boston Teachers Union, however, the Alliance was a company union. In spite of its antagonistic relationship with some members of the School Committee, administrators had initiated the Alliance, and they were also members. The school administration had encouraged the Alliance, according to the Boston Teachers Union, to check the union's growth.³⁵

In the fall of 1946, the Alliance took the lead in pushing for equal pay. It asked for cost-of-living increases of \$800 for persons at the top of the pay scale, \$1,000 for persons in the

34. See the *Boston Post*, March 20, 1946, p. 1; March 22, 1946, p. 1; March 23, 1946, p. 1; March 24, 1946, p. 6; March 25, 1946, p. 1; March 27, 1946, p. 1; May 2, 1946, p. 6; June 4, 1946, p. 1; June 5, 1946, p. 19; June 21, 1946, p. 13; June 24, 1946, pp. 3 and 15. Also see Christopher Burke Daly, "Twenty Years of Struggle, AFT Local 66: 1945-1965" (Senior Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1976), chapter 4.

35. Mary C. Cadigan to Mr. Elder, November 26, 1947, in AFT Papers, Mary C. Cadigan file (Series III, Box 2), ALUA.

middle, and \$1,200 for persons on the bottom rungs of the scale, who were mostly female elementary school teachers.³⁶ Eventually, in the spring of 1947, the School Committee granted raises, respectively, of \$400, \$500, and \$600.³⁷ While it was not all that the teachers had wanted, it was a step closer to more equal pay for men and women, and it also was a move toward a form of collective bargaining.

That same year, 1947, internal conflicts developed within the Boston Teachers Union. The men who had joined it found it difficult to work with the women leaders, and they resented the local's emphasis on equal pay. Like in the 1920s, they contacted the national AFT leaders about organizing a separate local for male teachers. The AFT leaders turned them down, however, citing past experience to argue against forming a separate men's local.³⁸ Though the Boston Teachers Union eventually ousted one man from the local for his activities against equal pay, other men continued their affiliation, for they had become convinced that affiliation with organized labor was a necessity, as one man in the Boston Teachers Union stated that "The men teachers of Boston know beyond disputation that any organizations acting without the support of the A.F. of L. are doomed to failure..."³⁹

In a surprise development in November of 1947, the equal pay issue was put on a referendum for the voters, through the initiative of the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers. The Boston Teachers Union then took the lead in speaking throughout the city to ensure its passage. All teachers' clubs, as well as Boston's clergy and labor organizations, supported the referendum.⁴⁰

Only the Alliance did not actively campaign in support of the referendum, even though many of its members had originally joined because of the equal pay issue. The Boston Teachers Union interpreted the Alliance's inaction on equal pay as

36. *Boston Post*, December 16, 1946, p. 1.

37. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1947, p. 1; February 11, 1947, p. 1.

38. Irvin R. Kuenzli to Bernard McCabe, January 10, 1947, in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 file, Boston Teachers Union Correspondence (Series XII, Box 74), ALUA.

39. Joseph H. Connors to Irvin R. Kuenzli, November 1, 1946, in AFT Papers, Local No. 66 BTU file, ALUA.

40. *Boston Post*, November 1, 1947, p. 2.

further proof that it was a company union. Instead of actively supporting the equal pay referendum, the Alliance concentrated its efforts on defeating the school committeeman who had antagonized the teachers. Union members reasoned that the committeeman had become an embarrassment to some administrators, which meant that working for his defeat served the interest of the administration, rather than the teachers.⁴¹

Only a group of male teachers, the Boston Men's Teachers' Committee, actively opposed the referendum. It raised all the same issues that men in the Boston Teachers Union had raised the year before, and that men in Local No. 100 had raised twenty years earlier: men needed more pay to support their families, and higher pay attracted and kept good men teachers, who, unlike women, had opportunities to work elsewhere. They also charged that the women teachers, particularly those who taught in the intermediate and high schools, were using the issue to get large and sudden increases for themselves, and that they were doing this unfairly, by using a popular referendum instead of normal procedures.⁴²

Boston's voters overwhelmingly supported their women teachers at the polls that November; the referendum passed by a huge margin. The *Boston Post* proclaimed the next day:

Boston's women school teachers rolled up a smashing victory in their fight for the same salary rights as men educators with the voters of the city approving the equal pay referendum by a decisive margin.⁴³

But old ideas die hard. In spite of the victory, women had still not received their increases by the spring of 1948. In addition, three out of five school committeemen moved to grant an additional \$400 increase to every male teacher in the system. One stated:

I still believe most of the men teachers are doing work that entitles them to more money than most

41. Cadigan to Elder, November 26, 1947.

42. *Boston Post*, October 30, 1947, p. 1.

43. *Ibid.*, November 5, 1947, p. 1.

of our women teachers are receiving.... I am convinced the men teachers are supporting families, they are buying groceries, and I am not foolish enough to believe the men can support families and live on the same scale of wages most of our women teachers are living on under present conditions.⁴⁴

Another noted that only women would collect from the equal pay referendum, so the men needed raises. The School Committee's own counsel said that such a move would be illegal, and the City Auditor insisted that he would refuse to make what he believed would be illegal payments, if they were granted.⁴⁵

The furor of the female teachers, the advice of the School Committee's counsel, and the reality of the law, eventually killed the idea of the \$400 bonus for men. The women were granted raises on May 28, 1948, retroactive to the date of the referendum.⁴⁶

Thus, several changed conditions helped pass equal pay: more female teachers, elementary as well as secondary, and non-union as well as union, actively supported the issue; some men supported it, while others didn't, but they had come to believe in and support labor affiliation. In addition, the state organization of the AFT had turned to a referendum for help, and the result clearly indicated that the people supported equal pay for male and female teachers. Teachers' increased concerns about working conditions, their willingness to organize in order to change those conditions, and the community's support of equity at the workplace, especially for women, had made a difference.

Organizationally, more teachers were coming to see the advantages of united action, whether in labor-affiliated or non-affiliated organizations. As barriers that divided them, such as strongly differentiated pay scales, were broken down, they eventually became more interested in the gains to be derived from their collective power, than in feared losses relative to other teachers. In other words, changed conditions eroded differences among segments of the workforce, making organization more attractive.

44. *Ibid.*, May 23, 1948, p. 1.

45. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1948, p. 1, and May 28, 1948, p. 7.

46. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1948, p. 6.

Another sex-equity issue became front-page news in Boston in the early months of 1944. It, too, divided teachers as well as the community. The national leaders of the AFT considered the issue to be even more sensitive than equal pay, and, therefore, they did not have a policy, leaving it up to individual locals to develop their own politices.⁴⁷

Grace Lonergan, the president of Local No. 441, the Boston Federation of Teachers, which had been formed in 1936 with a broad jurisdiction of members, had married. She decided to fight to retain her job in spite of her marriage. By an unwritten policy, which had been established in 1880, Boston's female teachers were required to voluntarily resign their teaching positions when they married.⁴⁸ They could be rehired, but only as temporary teachers, with a per diem salary and no benefits. Throughout the 1930s, there had been a surplus of teachers, due to a hiring freeze, but during World War II a shortage had developed. The married-teacher ban suddenly became more controversial. Since the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, 141 women had been forced to resign voluntarily due to marriage.⁴⁹

After teaching for nineteen years, Grace Lonergan Lorch had lost her \$2,300 per year job, when she married Private First Class Lee A. Lorch, on Christmas Eve of 1943. Later she was rehired, but as a temporary teacher at \$5 per day, or about \$800 per year. Because her husband was about to go overseas, Mrs. Lorch did not want to be forced to resign from her former position.⁵⁰

One school committeeman had unsuccessfully brought the issue to the Committee in June of 1941. He argued that the rule barring married women teachers encouraged women not to marry:

...in effect we put a premium on remaining unmarried. One of the few outstanding careers open to women is that of being a teacher, and if

47. Irvin R. Kuenzli to Grace Lonergan, January 11, 1944, and Irvin R. Kuenzli to Celia Levinson, February 9, 1944, both in AFT Papers, Local No. 441 file, ALUA.

48. Proceedings of the School Committee, City of Boston, 1944, March 7, 1944, p. 41.

49. Boston Globe, March 1, 1944, p. 6; Boston Post, March 1, 1944, p. 1.

50. Boston Globe, February 18, 1944, p. 1; Boston Post, February 18, 1944.

there is a rule of the School Committee which forbids teachers marrying while they teach, and if a young lady going through Teachers College more and more orients her mind to a career that prohibits marriage, I think it is a very bad emphasis. I feel as though I was sort of bribing a good many admirable women to shut their thoughts to the possibility of settling down and having a home.⁵¹

He argued that if the rule were changed, more women would probably marry and leave the system for five to ten years, which would not only allow them a freer choice to have a family, but it would open more positions for new teachers. As it was, female teachers were not presented with a choice.

In the spring of 1943, the School Committee had rejected petitions requesting a change in the rule regarding female teachers. In February of 1944, the Boston City Council defeated a proposal to lift the ban on married women teachers, by a vote of seventeen to one.⁵²

The School Committee finally agreed to hold a public hearing, which was scheduled for February 17, 1944. Mrs. Lorch was shouted down when she stated that the ban allowed "marriage for the privileged classes but not for working women," and when she quoted one of the city councilmen as having said that "it would be better for our armies to go down in defeat upon the battlefields of the world than to have women work."⁵³

Florence Birmingham, the president of the Massachusetts Women's Political Club, felt that the ban was now more important than ever:

With every social agency and the clergy of all denominations begging mothers to remain at home with their children, we cannot allow teachers to work after marriage.⁵⁴

51. Proceedings of the School Committee, City of Boston, 1941, June 23, 1941, p. 137.

52. Ibid., 1943, June 7, 1943, p. 96; Boston Post, February 8, 1944, p. 1.

53. Boston Globe, February 18, 1944; Boston Post, February 18, 1944.

54. Boston Globe, February 18, 1944.

She emphasized that servicemen, particularly, were opposed to taking wives and mothers out of the home. The issue was not just a conflict between married and single women, but a matter of what was best for the public:

Employment of wives is a retrograde movement from every angle . . . working wives are a menace to public welfare, health and morals The vanguard of democracy is in the home, not on the battlefronts.⁵⁵

The president of the non-union Boston Federation of Teacher Clubs also approved of the ban. She claimed that lifting the ban would deny promotion to unmarried women, and wreak havoc in the schools. She stated that "No women can successfully work at both teaching and marriage, both of which are full-time professions."⁵⁶ Thus, this non-union teacher organization did not support Local No. 441's opposition to the ban.

Other speakers who supported the ban on the employment of married female teachers claimed that the opponents of the ban had the backing of "every left-wing organization in the city." Speakers against the ban at the hearing included the American Federation of Teachers, the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers, the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Boston Women's Trade Union League, the Boston Civil Liberties Union, and the Citizens Committee for Teachers' Rights, as well as a state representative and a former school committeeman.⁵⁷

In the course of the stormy session, it was established that married women could be either hired back as temporaries, as Lorch had been, or, if they were widowed or their husbands were permanently disabled, they could take an examination in their subject and be allowed to return to work, on the first step of the salary schedule.⁵⁸ After the meeting, the Committee voted, four to one, to continue the ban on married women teachers, but it was

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.; Boston Post, February 18, 1944.

58. Proceedings of the School Committee, March 7, 1944, pp. 41-44.

decided that at the next week's meeting, it would consider a proposal to modify the ban, rather than repeal it.

At the following meeting the khaki-clad PFC Lorch, on furlough and about to return to active duty, explained that people at his army base did not believe his predicament.

I am stationed out in Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma. When I showed some people out there or told them what had happened to a lady who committed the crime of matrimony, that she was penalized and dismissed from her employment, they would not believe me. I had to write my wife and get the clippings from the Boston papers. What happened here does not happen elsewhere.⁵⁹

PFC Lorch was particularly upset about the conditions under which his wife would be permitted to continue her old job.

The only real hope I have that my wife might have a chance to pursue her chosen profession, to which she has given her entire adult life, is that I be killed, or incapacitated to the satisfaction of the School Committee.

If I am killed, or incapacitated to the satisfaction of the Committee, my wife, whose present salary is in excess of \$2,300, would be permitted to re-enter the system under the present rules at \$1,200 or approximately half of her present salary.

I am very sorry that a person who was an efficient and effective teacher over a period of many years, who was following her profession satisfactorily and happily, should be cut off from that income because of her marriage to me.⁶⁰

Private Lorch failed, however, to convince the Committee. The ban on married female teachers continued.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

In 1953, married women teachers were finally allowed to teach in the Boston Public Schools, when the teacher tenure law was amended. The League of Women Voters threw the weight of their organization behind the legislation, and they were finally able to overcome the legislators' resistance. The League had chosen passage of that legislation as its main legislative objective for the year.⁶¹

Again, like the issue of equal pay, teachers were divided over the issue of the married teacher ban, though this time divisions appeared to follow group affiliation and possibly, marital status, not gender alone, or grade-level. Broader political views also divided teachers and citizens. Many of those in favor of the ban, which included community groups, viewed the issue as one raised by the Left, since opposition to the ban had the united support of labor and liberal groups. It was not seen as an isolated issue of teachers' working conditions, or women's career choices. It is also possible, given the alleged left-leaning ideological orientation of Local No. 441, that the issue was in fact brought up by persons who were associated with leftist causes, and who used the married-teacher ban issue as a way to make clear their support of the War.

The group of Boston public school teachers in Local No. 441 of the Boston Federation of Teachers, who had the charter revoked to start Local No. 66 of the Boston Teachers Union, soon after this incident, took no position on the married-teacher ban, though soon thereafter they did actively work for equal pay. Perhaps their broader political views were also at issue. These teachers were mainly female high school teachers, who were united in their liberal politics and who shared ties with the Catholic Worker Movement, which supported pacifist views.⁶² The president of the Boston Teachers Union had herself been involved in an incident at school when she had refused to support war rationing on school time.⁶³ Perhaps these public school

61. Helen M. Leonard, Legislative Chairman of the Massachusetts State Branch of the AFT, "Legislative Report, 1953," Mass. State Branch AFT Document, May 20, 1953.

62. Daly, "Twenty Years," pp. 17-18; O'Neil, "Looking Backward."

63. *Boston Post*, November 27, 1948, p. 4; January 31, 1948, p. 6; February 1, 1949, p. 22; February 16, 1949, p. 1; Mary C. Cadigan to Superintendent Haley, November 1, 1948, in AFT Papers, Mary Cadigan file, ALUA; Irvin R. Kuenzli to Mary C. Cadigan, January 7, 1949, in AFT Papers, Mary Cadigan file, ALUA;

teachers shunned publicity that showed active support for the War. Perhaps most were also single, and they feared increased competition for promotions, as did the woman who had spoken for the Boston Federation of Teacher Clubs. Thus, female teachers, like the community as a whole, let broader national and international political issues, as well as personal considerations, shape their politics at the workplace.

The married-teacher ban, like unequal pay, fostered labor market segmentation by encouraging a workplace division by gender, as well as by marital status, and by rationalizing reduced working conditions and pay for some women because of it. Both the married-teacher ban and unequal pay for men and women were conditions inherited from tradition, and both met bitter resistance to change. The debate about both issues was embedded in and complicated by broader political views, not just those related to the workplace. In each case, teachers' views were gradually moving toward change, as their organizing shows, but change finally occurred when the voting public and the legislature banned the divisive and outmoded practices.

The realities of historically-determined working conditions, and the ideas that support them, change very slowly. In Boston, gender inequities in the teacher labor force, and ideas about the roles of women and men at work and in the family, were obstacles to teachers seeing their common interest. As those inequities were being questioned and attacked by some organized groups of teachers, who were supported by community members with changed views about gender-equity issues, teachers gained the vision to act in their common interest.

The segmentation by gender among Boston's teachers was not, however, originally brought about by the School Committee, as labor market segmentation theory suggests. It resulted when several formerly separate levels of schooling merged to form the public school system. It was then perpetuated by a cost-conscious School Committee, the labor pool of available teachers, general ideas about the role of women and men in society, AFT policy, and by the teachers themselves.

The School Committee, while not the sole perpetrator of segmentation, benefited most from it. Segmentation helped keep wages low for the bulk of the workforce, since most of the

O'Neil, "Looking Backward," *Reporter* [Mass. Federation of Labor publication], II (January, 1949), in AFT Papers, Mary Cadigan file, ALUA.

teachers were women. Segmentation also divided the workforce, thus, discouraging unionization.

Overcoming segmentation, in so far as it was maintained by a pay scale differentiated by gender and grade-level, as well as by the married-teacher ban, was important in uniting teachers in their political response to their working conditions. Equal pay and overturning the married-teacher ban were initial steps; a single-salary scale for elementary and secondary school teachers was an additional one. Teachers won this further step in 1957, largely through the leadership of the Alliance. Though it was not argued as a gender issue, the single salary scale also furthered the cause of gender equality, for almost all of the elementary school teachers, who stood to gain the most from it, were women.

Equal pay, overturning the married-teacher ban, and the single salary scale, all came before collective bargaining. They served as preconditions for the success of a political movement among Boston's teachers to establish a union of all teachers. In 1957, after Boston's teachers won the single salary schedule, the Alliance, which had been a single-issue organization since its inception, suddenly lacked focus and initiative. The Boston Teachers Union stepped into the vacuum, and soon began growing very rapidly. After a successful sick-leave campaign in the early 1960s, it pushed for collective bargaining. In the collective bargaining election which was held in 1965, Boston's teachers selected the Boston Teachers Union as their exclusive bargaining agent.

Women often formed the vanguard of teacher organizing in Boston, and they were in the forefront in fighting gender inequities; some also were in the vanguard of the opposition. Women were not just the progressives of the narrative, the proponents of more equal working conditions. Their views represented a wide political spectrum. In the course of the narrative, the men moved from one end of the political spectrum, the most conservative, toward the other. But neither women nor men as a segment of the teacher workforce can claim credit for propelling the current union into existence. When teachers overcame the gender segmentation which divided them, as exemplified by their gendered organizations, unequal pay, and the married-teacher ban, they could better see their common political interest in working together in a united labor organization, to resolve other workplace issues through collective bargaining.

The fact that most teachers have been women has dramatically shaped the conditions, workplace consciousness, and

ideology of and about teachers. Understanding the gender divisions and issues, which arose during a couple of periods of teacher organizing in Boston, gives additional perspective on the work lives of the teachers. While these gender-related issues were certainly not the only ones that teachers faced in their organizing, it was necessary to resolve such issues, which grew out of the historical composition of the educational workforce. And in doing so, the collective, professional identity of teachers was advanced.