

New directions

Opinion pieces in two different daily newspapers have spoken to many of the problems facing working people today. Each acknowledges that the needs and the make-up of "the working class" has changed.

Management guru Peter F. Drucker has written a provocative column in the Oct. 5 Wall Street Journal. (Thoughtful readers will wonder why it was headlined "The Decline in Unionism" since that neither is news nor the main point of the column.)

The editors of Portland's morning daily, The Oregonian, of all people, seemed to have grasped the essence of it and applied that to an Oct. 7 editorial about the teachers' strike in the Baker school district.

The point is that unions and management must -- according to Drucker -- and that organized teachers are -- according to the Oregonian editors -- address a host of new issues if they are to solve the problems and discomforts of working in America in the last quarter of the 20th Century. Issues apart from salary increases, that is.

The salary issue in Baker, for example, more or less is

settled. "The tougher issues," says The Oregonian, "have been job security provisions, teaching conditions, lesson preparation time, class sizes, discipline and other working conditions related to teaching and learning."

The editors restate the point: "(Statewide) negotiation patterns seem to make it clear that teachers have found the key to getting reasonable pay increases, and are now more concerned with having a greater voice in operation of the schools -- particularly as related to teaching and learning."

Drucker acknowledges the growth in public sector unionism and then goes on to say that the change in the make-up of the labor market brings new problems which are not now being addressed either by management nor labor. The end of mandatory retirement will cause problems for both older and younger workers; older women entering the job market in increasing numbers often want parttime, not fulltime, jobs. "The question of the rights, benefits, and obligations of these groups has not been tackled yet," Drucker says. "For example, what about

their seniority and promotions?"

By Drucker's standards, OSEA must be pretty progressive judging from his list of other issues "for which neither management nor labor is yet prepared." They are: Offsetting the loss to the employee of higher taxes which result from salary increases and "settling the question of union representation on boards of directors..." The deferred compensation bill which OSEA helped lobby through the legislature will help solve the first problem and OSEA representation on the board of a health and welfare trust fund, which the current state central agreement gets started, is an example of the second issue.

Unions shouldn't be on the decline, as the Wall Street Journal headline says, but unions must go where the market for their services is and address the contemporary problems in that market. Put simply, office or service workers are no less powerless nor working at no less tedious jobs than are the manufacturing production workers where unions in the past have found their strength. (Bentley Gilbert)

Organization

Organization. That's a word that will be used a lot in the coming months. The reason it's such an important word is that it is the essential ingredient if OSEA is to accomplish the goals it has set for itself.

Unfortunately, one of the best examples of a successful organization is that conservative, one-issue group known as the National Rifle Association (NRA). While it is heavily involved in many worthwhile causes such as hunter safety, the place where its organizational excellence shows itself the best and the most publicly is its successful lobby against any form of gun control. Its organization and tactics recently were examined by the CBS News program "60 Minutes."

The NRA boasts over a million members nationwide and each one knows exactly why he or she is a member and feels strongly about it. This is the source of its strength: The membership is large and it is well-informed on the gun control issue.

Also, the membership participates politically. With such a large membership, it has a large number of people in each congressional district. They vote. They write letters to their congressman and to the newspaper. They get on campaign committees. They go door

to door. The result: There are no national gun control laws and there are not likely to be any as long as each congressman knows that to vote for gun control will pit this solid bloc of voters against him.

All of this membership means a great deal of money for the national headquarters. It is spent well. The NRA produces a slick magazine. It also has made the computer mailing campaign into a fine art. Millions of letters can go out at nearly a moment's notice advising members their congressman has done this, or support us with money for that, or watch out here, or let's mount a campaign there. After that, the membership takes over. It's done it before. It can compose letters to the editor or to congressmen from the literature it has been getting from the

national headquarters on a regular basis. The NRA is organized.

The magnificence of the NRA organization stands apart from its policies and programs. Some may support gun control, at least for handguns, others may view it as the first chip off that old block of freedom. The NRA may be faulted for its tenacity to one issue. It never changes. A progressive labor union must concern itself with a variety of issues and, while its main thrust is service to its members, those issues now are under going a period of extreme change and becoming less tangible.

However, as with the NRA, whatever those issues, it will take an effective organization to bring them into being. (Bentley Gilbert)

Flex hours

Flex time is for you. This is OSEA's position and the Executive Department agrees with it.

OSEA's Angelo Stephenson has met several times recently with officials in the Executive Department to make sure that flex hours are as flexible as possible for state employees.

Certainly, problems will arise. The only way to get these problems resolved quickly and to the benefit of the employees involved is to let OSEA know as soon as possible.

You have a right to flex hours, but only you can make sure that it works properly.

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