

The Impotent School Board

by Robert Bendiner

Of all the agencies devised by Americans to guide their public affairs, few are as vague in function as the school board and few take office in an atmosphere of such resounding indifference. Yet, ironically, probably no other unit of government is capable of stirring community passions to so fine a froth.

This strange effect, often disproportionate to the board's actual impact on events, is at least partly explained by its unique role in the processes of government. For the school board is really neither legislative nor administrative in function, and only in the most limited way, judicial. Almost entirely outside these normal categories, it has homier and less precise functions not usually found in civics textbooks at all: it is local philosopher, it is watchdog, and it is whipping boy.

For at least a century before the current educational revolution began, American school boards led reasonably tranquil official lives, addressing themselves for the most part to such matters as building plans, voucher-signing, plumbing repairs, and the eternal raising of funds. But they left educational policy and the day-to-day operation of the schools to the superintendent—no self-respecting superintendent would have had it otherwise. More important, the boards generally managed to keep their commitments within the bounds of their resources.

The urban or suburban school board of today, by contrast, must frequently commit itself to actions that it may not be able to carry out, that cost money it does not have and may not be able to raise. It has been pushed into that most hopeless of all positions for a unit of

government—an incongruity between responsibility and power. From the consequent strife on several fronts—equality of opportunity, finances, and the new militancy of teachers—the question that inevitably arises is whether the local American school board, at least in its present form, can—or should—survive.

It is the last of these that I would deal with here. For within the past decade the long and genteel tradition of the school board has been most drastically shaken up by the swift development of collective bargaining and the introduction of the omnibus contract. It is common now for a board to be engaged for months in haggling with canny negotiators brought in from distant headquarters of the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers. And it must not only pass on such large issues as salary schedules and grievance machinery, but in many cases negotiate the minutest aspects of the school day. (Will all teachers be exempt from lunchtime cafeteria duty? Will the school system reimburse teachers for dentures lost in line of duty? etc.)

The result, often enough, is that a board finds itself desperately trying with one hand to resolve conflicting interests in the community—in the matter of racial balance, for example—while trying with the other to satisfy its faculty on a proposed contract running to several hundred items. And failure to satisfy the teachers on some of these points may mean an occurrence unimagined until this decade: a protracted teachers' strike, complete with shouting pickets, court orders and counter-orders.

So fast and feverish has been the trend

toward teacher militancy that it is hard to appreciate how fresh a phenomenon it really is. As recently as 1961 the National Education Association took the restrained view that: "The seeking of consensus and mutual agreement on a professional basis should preclude the arbitrary exercise of unilateral authority by boards of education and the use of the strike by teachers as a means for enforcing economic demands." And the American Federation of Teachers, whose affiliates were and are essentially trade unions, was hardly more militant than the NEA, which prided itself on being a professional rather than a labor organization.

Since then all such academic inhibitions have gone up in the smoke of battle. Two teachers' strikes occurred in 1965, sending shock waves through the fraternity. In 1966, there were 33. In 1967, the lid blew off, with more than 80. In the spring of 1968, when most eyes focused on Morningside Heights, 30,000 teachers throughout Florida participated in a "mass resignation," described by Dr. Sam M. Lambert, executive secretary of the NEA, as "one of the biggest show-and-tell demonstrations in the history of education." The AFT's chief contribution to teacher militancy that spring was a two-week strike by the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers to back demands for a collective-bargaining election.

By last fall the teacher rebellion had reached the point where 170,000 men and women—ten per cent of the nation's teaching force—were on the picket line when schools reopened after the summer vacation. Although strikes of varying duration punctuated the fall season, all of them paled beside the three mammoth strikes called by New York's United Federation of Teachers, which kept some 50,000 teachers and a million pupils out of classes for 36 of the first 48 school days of the term.

It is not a simple matter to explain this sudden turn to aggressive trade-

union tactics by people whose professional association had once stated:

The teacher's situation is completely unlike that of an industrial employee. A board of education is not a private employer, and a teacher is not a private employee. Both are public servants.

There had to be reasons for the shift. In any case of labor unrest, the source of trouble is reasonably certain to be insufficient money or dissatisfaction in the work, or both, the two factors often operating in a somewhat reciprocal fashion. Teachers used to be satisfied with low pay, or at least they were not acutely dissatisfied with it. They either shared a general view of their inadequacy that amounted almost to a national tradition, or they gained enough personal reward from their efforts to compensate for their marginal salaries. But society changes for teachers, as it does for the rest of us. A married man working in a Manhattan school in 1969 cannot be expected to have the same view of the world (and his place in it) as that of an Iowa schoolmarm of the 19th century. His school is not the intimate, personal haven that gave her a feeling of warmth and a sense of belonging. On the contrary, it is huge, mechanically administered, organized from the top down, and usually distant from his own community.

At the same time that the modern teacher's alienation grows in intensity, the demands on him grow likewise. He is expected to make up in the classroom for all the tragically damaging elements in his students' environment: bad housing, undernourishment, lack of stimulation at home, and self-images warped by the gross injustices of society. In the core cities, moreover, he is likely to face disciplinary problems undreamed of 20 years ago.

Academically, he must be far better prepared than his early predecessors, not only because subject matter is vastly more comprehensive, but be-

cause longer preparation for a teaching career is a condition of his hiring. The typical classroom teacher today has nearly five years of education beyond the high-school diploma, where, not so long ago, two years of normal school sufficed.

True, the training of teachers is less demanding than that of other professionals, and education majors are generally rated low in academic proficiency among undergraduate groups. Yet there can be no doubt that by skill and preparation a teacher deserves better treatment than he gets from a society that more than adequately rewards its football players, television repairmen, and swimming-pool salesmen.

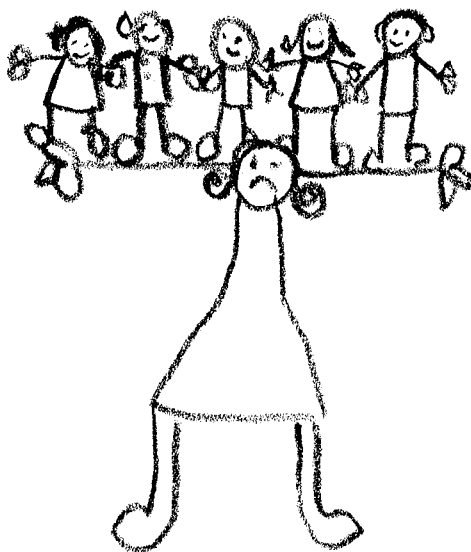
Teachers' salaries have gone up every year in the past decade—61.6 per cent from the school year 1957-58 in dollars, 38 per cent in purchasing power, based on the Consumer Price Index. In 1957-58, 59.1 per cent of classroom teachers were getting less than \$4,500 a year; today no more than 2.3 per cent are below that level, and about 21 per cent are making more than \$8,500.

Even so, neither of the great teacher organizations is prepared to concede that the upward movement has more than gotten up a head of steam. A probable factor in the growing militancy is

the increase in the number of men teachers, whose financial needs are likely, sooner or later, to be greater than those of women (and whose urge to act on those needs is correspondingly sharper). While the number of women teachers increased by 38.4 per cent in the past decade, the number of men went up 75.9 per cent. And many of them, especially the younger ones, are fresh from campuses where revolt is fast becoming an academic way of life.

It is unlikely, however, that teacher militancy would have come to much if New York City's United Federation of Teachers, a local affiliate of the AFT, had not demonstrated that teachers *could* strike, whether or not the law prohibited such action, and that it could win its demands in precisely the same way that similar demands are won by coal miners, teamsters, packing-house workers, and newspaper reporters.

In 1960, the Federation, just formed out of a merger between the New York Teachers Guild and the High School Teachers Association, revealed the vacillation of the city's Board of Education and the corresponding effectiveness of a walkout. The issue was over



the principle of collective bargaining and the Federation's demand for an election to determine the choice of a bargaining agent. The Board readily assented, but the union, charging undue delay, exhibited its youthful muscle by calling for a one-day work stoppage. Less than 5,000 of the city's 37,000 teachers responded, but when the Board yielded without a hint of disciplinary action the shape of things to come was clearly discernible.

In the ensuing election, the UFT made a showing of some 20,000 supporters, which was about four times the number of its dues-paying members. When bargaining negotiations broke down in the spring of 1962, the UFT was ready for action. Here was no "professional holiday," or "withdrawal of services," but a full-fledged strike by 20,000 teachers. By the end of the first day, both the Mayor and the Governor felt compelled to bring about an agreement on salaries, though the full terms of the contract were to require many more weeks of detailed negotiation.

The New York success had an electric effect on teachers throughout the country—in the NEA as well as the AFT. Both organizations hastened toward militant action, and competition between them, the need to outdo each other in the gains promised to teachers, has since become a prime source of difficulty for school boards.

In 1967, the NEA sharply revised its stand on the strike as a weapon for teachers. At its convention that year it sounded this trumpet call: "The NEA recognizes that under conditions of severe stress, causing deterioration of the educational program, and when good-faith attempts at resolution have been rejected, strikes have occurred and may occur in the future. In such instances the NEA will offer all of the services at its command to the affiliate concerned to help resolve the impasse." If the statement fell short of trade-union purity,

it was still a far cry from that "seeking of consensus and mutual agreement on a professional basis" which had formerly been the Association's closest approach to class warfare. By 1968, it is worth noting, a poll showed that the percentage of public-school teachers endorsing recourse to the strike rose to 68.2, up 15 percentage points from 1965.

The result is that the atmosphere surrounding public education is undergoing a marked and acrid change. Without desiring it or expecting it, the school board finds itself in an adversary position. The "old buddy" atmosphere that once characterized a board's relationship with employee groups has largely given way to a wary suspiciousness. One superintendent, Dr. John Blackhall Smith, of Birmingham, Michigan, provides this glimpse of that atmosphere:

The docile, timid teachers' committee of three years ago has been replaced by a knowledgeable, hungry negotiation team, extremely well-trained, and headed by an aggressive, well-rehearsed, full-time executive of the local Association or Federation.

Boards of Education find themselves unprepared, uncertain, disorganized, unorganized, and badgered from all sides with suggestions, directions, and ample criticism. In the middle of it is the superintendent of schools who finds himself not only thrust into a role demanding great skill and training, but divorced from contacts and associations with his teaching staff and, in some instances, even with his administrators.

Dr. Smith's description goes to the heart of the board's plight. Teacher organizations have at their disposal all the data and all the sophisticated equipment that their national organizations can buy. And anyone who doubts the



scope of the NEA's operations in this respect need only visit the elaborate Washington headquarters of this "largest professional organization in the world," with its proliferation of 35 departments, 17 divisions, and 25 commissions and committees—all supported by some ten million members (dues are \$15 a year), not to mention the income from publication sales and membership in the various specialized departments.

In contrast to this mammoth output of data and assistance, the individual school board relies largely on its local sources of information and the meager help it may get from its own National School Boards Association. This loose and sparsely financed federation of state boards is primarily a lobbying organization; it is in no position to give a board in trouble the kind of support that a local teachers' association can count on from its parent organizations, both state and national. Beyond these sources, the board must rely on information put out by those same teacher organizations with which they find themselves embroiled.

The hapless members of a school board, moreover, are by no means free to sit at the bargaining table all hours of the day and night. Engaged full-time in earning a living or raising their families, they cannot devote themselves exclusively to negotiations until fatigue sets in or a settlement is reached. And most trying of all their difficulties, rarely has experience equipped them for the subtleties and "gamesmanship" of collective bargaining. Unfamiliar with the jargon and stratagems of the game, they often misread the signs of their opponents, mistaking a "maybe" for a "no" and a "no" for a "never." As Dr. Wesley Wildman of the University of Chicago remarked, it is a field in which "the curse of amateurism is rampant."

To be sure, the bargaining power is not entirely on one side; if it were, there could be no negotiations at all. Teachers in many districts, especially those far removed from the big cities, still regard the strike as unprofessional, illegal, or both, and this feeling may be turned to a board's advantage. Then, too, boards are coming to recognize that bargaining

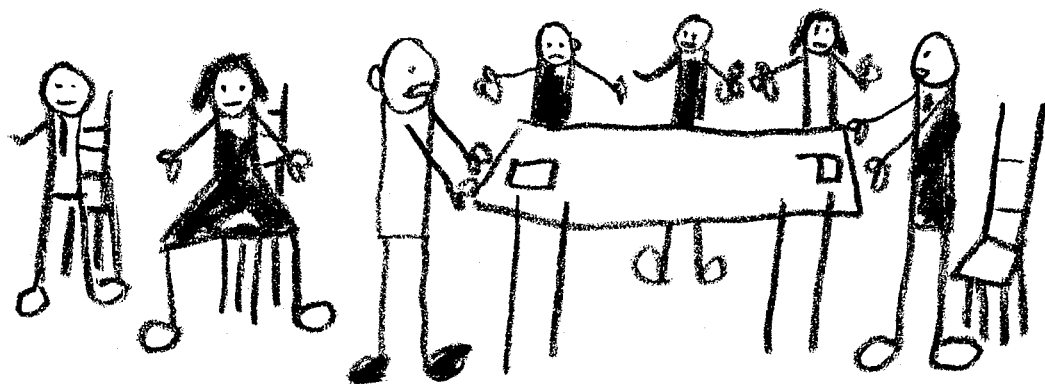
may not be their forte; they are relying more and more on hired negotiators whose skills match those of the teachers' hired professionals.

Yet there is little doubt that the balance is swinging sharply in the teachers' direction or that it might have done so much sooner if the teachers had perceived—and chosen to make use of—their natural strength. For the simple fact is that a school board faced with a strike has nothing of comparable strength with which to counter it. And what sometimes makes a board's position completely impossible is that it may be just as powerless to satisfy the teachers' demands as it is to oppose their ultimate sanction.

Even when a board technically has the resources to pay teachers what they ask (or to reach a reasonable compromise of those demands), it may feel that it ought not to do so at the expense of other claims on its funds—such as introducing foreign languages in the elementary grades, expanding the remedial reading program, hiring additional personnel, giving closed-circuit television a tryout, or perhaps revising the cur-

riculum to give a more profound view of Negro contributions to American society. The Board may be right or wrong in its choice of expenditures, but the choice is legally the boards' to make, and it cannot surrender it for the sake of good labor relations without abandoning its plain obligation. To all of which the teachers put forth the plausible counter-argument: if they are entitled to more money, they should not be asked to forego a raise in pay in order to subsidize other improvements that the community is unwilling to pay for.

While some nostalgically inclined boards may long for the days before teachers had to be dealt with as a highly organized and hard-headed group, no one expects those days to return. But mere acceptance of collective bargaining as fact of life is not enough. When a school board decides that negotiating with teachers is henceforth to be a regular and major part of its job, it may draw a deep breath, as one does upon making a decision long resisted. But the breath should not be too deep, for the board will soon discover that its troubles have only begun.



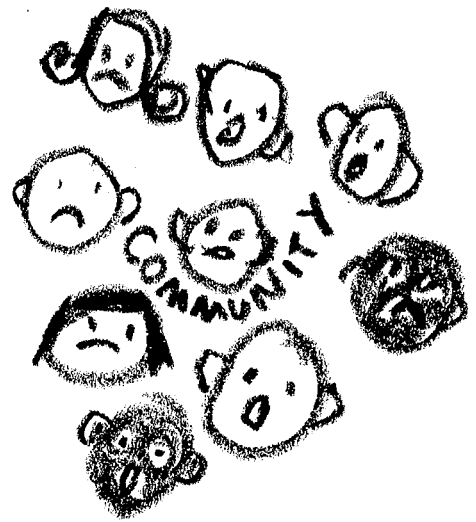
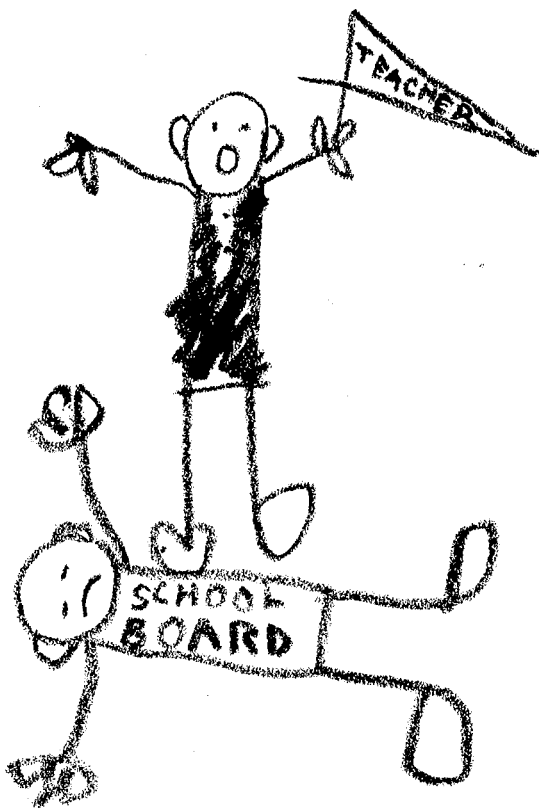
At The Bargaining Table

Two stark truths confront a school board at the outset of its relationship with a teachers' organization:

- Public-school teachers enjoy a natural monopoly; as a body, they cannot be replaced. Thus they are assured

forgiveness even when the tactics they resort to are illegal or crippling.

- As individuals, teachers are usually secure in their jobs by virtue of tenure. Therefore, if a board yields to teacher demands for the power to make



policy, the teachers can exercise that power without assuming any of the board's accountability to the public.

Although these facts and the implications that flow from them clearly diminish a school board's bargaining power, a community's educational policy is still the responsibility of the board; indeed, it is a principal reason for its existence. The extent to which, for better or worse, that policy is modified or changed as part of the bargaining process is the extent to which the already diminished authority of the board is further eroded.

It is also apparent that the leaders of the two main teachers' organizations—the NEA and the AFT—have just this erosion in mind and that they consider it a fair subject at the bargaining table. In her inaugural speech, Mrs. Koontz stated the case bluntly: "In policy determination and in shaping the educational institutions, professional negotiation is not a luxury, it is a necessity." Teachers, she said, would no longer allow "decisions on educational issues, philosophy, and principles" to

be made unilaterally by "self-styled experts and well-intentioned and oft-times uninformed persons who are far removed from the realities of the school-room"—whether or not, it would seem, such persons were entrusted with that function by law.

The AFT's position has become equally sweeping, although, in the trade-union tradition, it concerns itself more with bread-and-butter issues than with educational theory. When I asked President David Selden where he would draw the line between what was negotiable and what was not, his answer was blunt and uncomplicated: "There is no line. Anything the two parties can agree on is negotiable."

That position might sound reasonable if it were not for the hard fact that a board, pressed by a hundred demands and the threat of a strike, might well agree to negotiate on matters that ought not be negotiated, in exchange for concessions in matters that should.

Boards do not as a rule balk at negotiating procedural issues that go beyond salaries and hours, so long as they

clearly bear on a teacher's working conditions. They have yielded, for example, on such minor demands as a "mumps clause" (teachers who catch the mumps, measles, or chicken pox from their students will have only half of the school time they miss charged against their sick leave); twice-a-day coffee breaks; reserved parking space; and even a warning sign ("beep-beep") to notify teachers when their classrooms are about to be monitored from the principal's office.

But many board members find it an altogether different matter, and a violation of conscience, to yield to demands that teachers be allowed to elect their principals, or that they be given the decisive voice in curriculum or textbook selection, or in the recruitment, assignment, and disciplining of their colleagues.

A good case can be made that teachers, as professional educators, should have some voice in these matters. But should that voice be that of teachers as individual professionals, or of teachers as a trade union represented by an agent sent out from headquarters? Should the voice be advisory, or should it come in the form of demands? And if presented as demands, should they be argued and settled on their merits or put forward as chips on the bargaining table, possibly to be withdrawn in exchange for higher salaries, shorter hours, or improved fringe benefits?

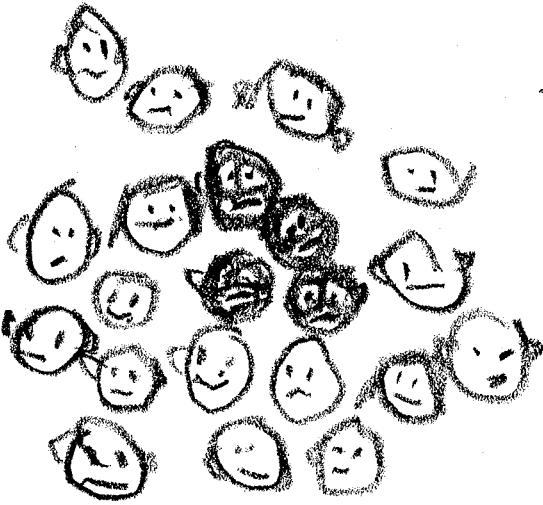
One authority on the subject, Dr. Myron Lieberman, Director of Educational Research and Development at Rhode Island College and an authority on the subject, objects to teacher participation in policy-making primarily because the tenure they have insisted upon serves to exempt them from responsibility to the public. "If teachers want to be equal partners in formulating educational policy, then they should give up any right to teacher tenure... because in a democratic society we

ought to have the right to change our policy-makers."

The profession, however, shows no intention of pursuing this line of thought. Indeed, the NEA president's comment on the subject at last year's convention tended strongly in the other direction. "We must have a secure profession," Mrs. Koontz exhorted her colleagues. "Tenure laws must be developed in every state and strengthened to cope with change. Such tenure laws should be proposed or enacted in every state by 1970."

Beyond the demands of militant teachers, the school board, faced with a population explosion, a cultural explosion, and a racial explosion, all combining to send costs skyrocketing, finds itself still trying to meet those costs largely out of local property taxes, a fast fading source of revenue. From all of which it may well appear to the reader that there is little reason for the local school board to continue at all but for the fact that no good alternative is in sight. This would be a discouraging conclusion indeed, but happily one that is hardly justified.

An alternative is emerging—slowly, with variations and difficulty, but with promise, too, because it corresponds in school government to the evolutionary change that is even more slowly and painfully emerging on the political front. I refer to that still groping movement in the country's great metropolitan areas toward some sort of internal cooperation—between suburb and suburb, between city and county, between city and suburb—a cooperation ranging from the loosest agreements on specific matters all the way to consolidation, federation, and metropolitan area government, that new political entity that has been cropping up here and there under the name of Metro.



Giving an air of inevitability to the development in one form or another is the stark fact, becoming starker daily, that without it government will ultimately be impossible in the urban complexes where 70 per cent of the American people already live. The Advisory Commission on Inter-Governmental Relations observed, as early as 1961, this consequence of the trek to the suburbs: "The resultant congestion and sprawl of the urban population and the interdependence of communities within the metropolitan areas have made it increasingly difficult for local governments to deal with many functions on less than an area-wide basis." The functions that might be metropolitan would vary from place to place, the commission reported, but "a concern for equality of educational opportunity and the most efficient planning for the provision of educational services (is) a major motivating force" in the trend. A succeeding commission, made up of high officials from all three levels of government, subsequently urged that school taxation in metropolitan areas be assessed regionally and that school-financing

districts spanning city and suburb be promoted by state and federal action.

It takes no stretch of the imagination to see how such a uniform regional tax—the revenue from which would be distributed with full allowance for special needs—would go far to solve the problems of Buffalo and Baltimore, of Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia. For everywhere the picture is the same, with the metropolitan area constituting, in Robert J. Havighurst's phrase, "a middle-class suburban doughnut surrounding a central city slum ghetto." Referring specifically to Boston, Peter Schrag has written, "There will be no genuine public education in the city if suburban populations remain perpetually exempt from the obligation to support it."

Not least among the virtues of a metropolitan area school system—before we come to its difficulties—is the comparative freedom it would provide from those extreme local pressures and inhibitions which are to be distinguished from the perfectly legitimate pressures that are part of the democratic process. Here the essence of the matter is contained in Madison's famous dictum: "Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests," thereby reducing the dangers of factional control, whether by a militant minority or an insensitive majority.

In a small district, the pressure from parents and less altruistically interested parties may operate to keep a school system tied up in a provincial straitjacket. Complaints about sex education, particular approaches to reading, or the morality of books assigned in literature courses—all affect local school policy without necessarily reflecting in the least the sentiment of people even ten miles down the road.

Myron Lieberman stated the proposition boldly in arguing that it is not the professionals who are responsible for introducing trivia into the curricu-

lum, as some of their critics contend: "No diagnosis could be more stupid. Subjects which have no real content or professional justification do not get included because school personnel ignore public opinion, but because they follow public opinion. The criticism that school administrators try to engineer public opinion to put over their own curriculum ideas is absurd; this is precisely what they ought to be doing, and are not." He saw academic freedom assured only in that largest of all districts—the entire nation.

The idea that a federal system, subject at any time to the intervention of remote officials, not to mention Congressional committees, would be totally free of pressure seems naive, but Lieberman's point concerning provincial tyrannies is surely well taken, especially in the light of his further observation:

"It is a striking fact that in England, which has a national system of education, teachers are opposed to local control precisely because they fear that such control would undermine academic freedom. Meanwhile, teachers in the United States continue to act as if local control must be maintained inviolate lest academic freedom (which they do not possess) be imperiled."

Not least among the pressure groups with which local boards are often unable to cope, although on a different level entirely, are, of course, the teachers themselves. Would a metropolitan area board do better on this score than a dozen contiguous but wholly separate districts? From the experience we have to go on, it would certainly seem so.

With the scope of influence greatly extended on both sides of the bargaining table and the stakes greatly increased, it is likely, to begin with, that professionals would take over on both sides. The teachers, moreover, would not be able to whipsaw one little district against another in an endless game of raising the ante—while the board, for

its part, would presumably feel the weight of negotiating not for a restricted locality but for a major area. Bigness has its drawbacks, but the experience of industry suggests that in labor relations bigness may also be a factor for stability (although too cozy a working relationship between giants could admittedly lead to stagnation).

Finally, teachers are likely to be pleased in the long run by the steady rise in standards that a financially more secure metropolitan arrangement can assure. And boards, in turn, should feel a bit safer for the reduced mobility of teachers no longer free to move to an adjoining district half a mile away if they are less than completely satisfied.

What possible drawbacks can there be to a school system which could deal far more effectively than the present localism with the requirements of integration, collective bargaining, academic freedom, and the adequate and equitable financing of public education? First, there is the admitted difficulty of making itself acceptable to those who don't want their taxes to help pay for the education of other people's children. That is a question of tactics, which will be considered presently. Substantively, the Metro idea is charged with one major sin: it is big, and therefore presumably bureaucratic and remote from the people.

At a time when "community control" is the cry in the cities and hardly an urban politician runs for office without paying lip service to decentralization in some form or another, why invite the dangers of an even larger district than the city? How can the small be protected within the large? How can localism be retained within metropolitanism? For a view of that art in practice, one can turn only to the city of Toronto and its environs, where the emphasis is not so much on bigness and supergovernment as it is on the warmer and more attractive concept of federation.

The Toronto Story

For 15 years a great urban complex in Canada has been experimenting with, and constantly improving, a system of urban government that political scientists in the United States have only talked wishfully about, as though it were a utopian scheme suitable for pleasant speculation. I refer to the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, a political entity covering 240 square miles and embracing, besides the city itself, the five boroughs of North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, and East York.

How Metro came into being may be sketched briefly. In the decade that followed World War II, the Toronto area jumped in population from 942,762 to roughly 1,300,000, an increase of some 38 per cent. But while the city proper gained fewer than 200 souls in that time, the suburbs rocketed up by 137 per cent. The impact of this explosive growth staggered the independent municipalities that ringed the city. Most of them were financially unable to maintain anything like adequate municipal standards, and all of them suffered acutely for lack of unified services. Within the single county that contained them there were no fewer than 113 administrative bodies and 30 separate transportation lines. Every suburban police force had its own short-wave length, so that a general alarm from Toronto had to be telephoned to each local police department, which in turn sent out a warning to its own cruiser cars. Water supply was so meager in North York that thickly settled areas were obliged to use septic tanks intended for rural areas, and the inadequacy of sewage disposal in general had already polluted two rivers and the shorefront of Lake Ontario.

As the crisis deepened, the Ontario government warned that unless some

form of cooperative government were developed between city and suburbs, the province would step in and do it for them. After much wrangling, once so bitter that Toronto threatened to cut off a suburb's water supply if it did not take back its slurs on the city, the Provincial government acted. The Ontario parliament passed Bill 80, which has served since 1954 as the charter for the Metro system.

Under the new arrangement, each of the quarreling communities retained its local government and continued to guard its identity as jealously as a Georgian defending states' rights. But Metro taxes, based on property assessments made uniform for the entire area, were paid to the new unit of government, which in turn took over area-wide municipal services—transit, water supply, sewage disposal, some roads, and at least the capital financing and location of new schools.

Since then, finding more advantage in the arrangement than it had evidently expected, Ontario authorities and legislators have considerably extended Metro's hand in the operation of the schools. Yet the control is not that of a remote centralized bureau, autocratic in its decisions. Rather, the system is one of autonomy within a federation, with well-defined limitations on each.

Avoiding both the extremes of centralization and decentralization, the school system is a two-tiered arrangement in the sense that all members of the Metro school board serve on two levels. Each of the six local boards sends its chairman plus, in the case of Etobicoke and Scarborough, one additional trustee appointed by his fellows. Two such additional trustees are allowed from North York, in proportion to its population, and five from Toronto. Three members representing the sep-

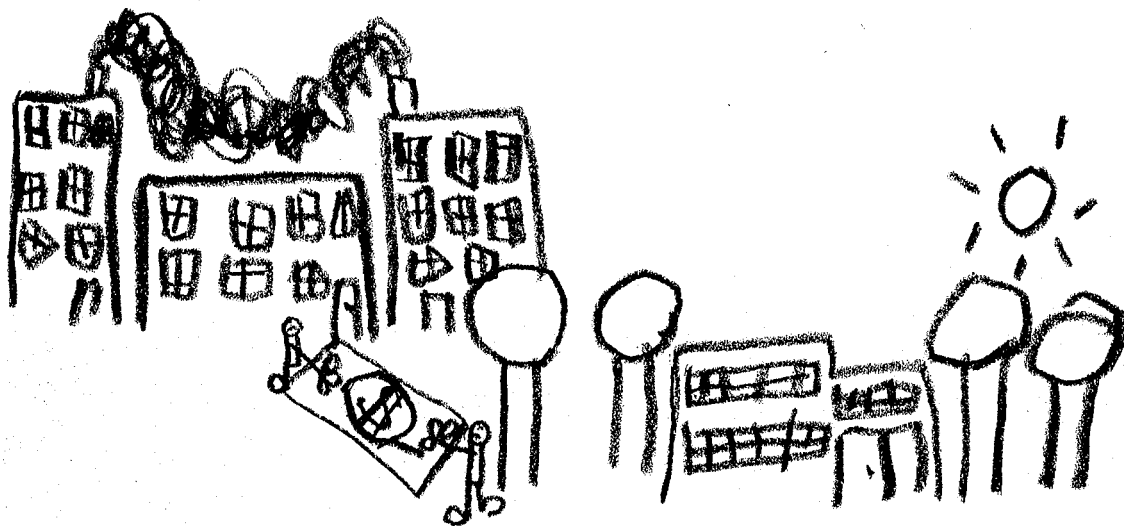
arate, or non-public, schools round out the Metro board, which elects one of its number as chairman.

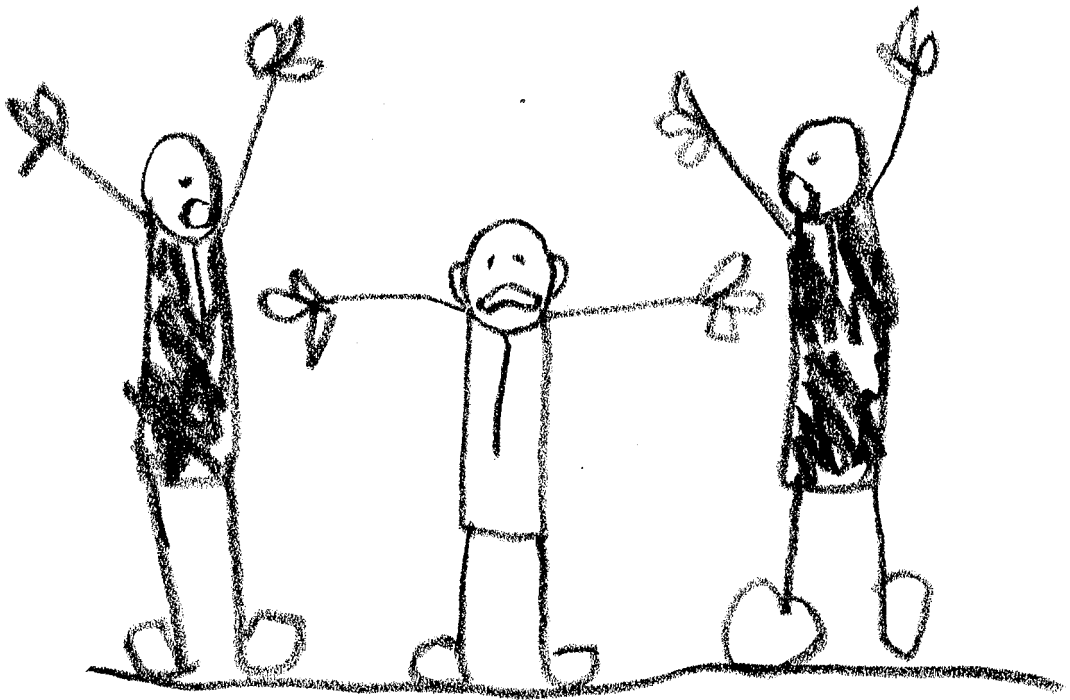
Originally the Metro school board borrowed money centrally to meet capital costs, collected taxes from the constituent communities through the Metro Council, and distributed funds to the local boards in the form of "maintenance assistance payments" based on the number of pupils in attendance—not too different from state aid in the United States, except that it averaged 60 per cent of a local board's revenues, considerably more than most of our states are willing to pay to equalize the load.

Nevertheless, the plan did not work well enough. It achieved a rough dollar equality but fell considerably short of the kind of distribution that real equality of opportunity required. Under a revised scheme adopted two years ago, the role of the Metro board is to a far greater extent one of judgment. In the words of W.J. McCordic, its dynamic executive secretary and chief administrator, the board's function is "to secure the funds to finance an educational program, to apportion these funds fairly and equitably in relation to need, and to carry out these numerous responsibilities in such a way as to strengthen rather than weaken the autonomy and viability of the six component school systems."

In practice each of these local systems draws up its own operating budget, including whatever new approaches, experiments, or additions it may see fit to initiate. The budget is passed on to the Metro board and defended there by the local's member-representatives. The board as a whole, sitting as a kind of judicial body, tries to reconcile the local district's budget with the needs of the other area boards, eventually putting them all together in a Metro school budget designed to meet special needs and still strike a fair balance. This it passes on to the Metro Council, which is charged with raising the required revenue. No doubt some log-rolling occurs—a tacit understanding, say, that the representatives of Scarborough will support a special request in the Etobicoke budget in return for reciprocal consideration the following year. But, as McCordic says, "What's wrong with that?" It is at least give-and-take, rather than demand-and-reject.

Should a local board feel genuinely aggrieved, two courses are open to it. It may carry the matter to the Ontario Municipal Board, a quasi-judicial body which acts as a kind of ombudsman, or it can impose an additional tax of up to 2.5 mills on its own local citizenry for some special purpose denied by Metro.





There is a flexibility in the Toronto arrangement which allows a balancing of appropriations that is politically refreshing. "Some would have us apportion the funds by a simple formula method of so much per pupil for each area board," explains Barry G. Lowes, chairman of the Metro school board. "Such a formula would be clear dereliction of our duty and, furthermore, it simply could not do the job of sharing funds equitably." After the initial agitation for per capita allocations, he says, "the districts learned to yield to the special needs of other areas," whether it was additional teachers for fast-growing North York or junior kindergarten classes for non-English-speaking children of the inner city.

Technically, collective bargaining is still carried on between the teachers and their local boards. But in the name of coordination there has been a steady drift toward conducting negotiations at Metro headquarters with the assistance of Metro's Salary Committee. Slowing

up this trend, no doubt, was the fantastic division of the teachers themselves into numerous groups—elementary school men, elementary school women, secondary teachers of both sexes, English Catholic school men, English Catholic school women, French Catholic school men, French Catholic school women, etc. Fragmented, they found it easier and more personal to deal with their local employers. "We were comfortable with our own little boards," said Robert Brooks, president of the Toronto district of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation. "They were close to local problems, and we were afraid of losing contact with the trustees." Besides, although they are not nearly as militant and aggressive as their opposite numbers south of the border, the teachers could hardly avoid seeing a certain usefulness in pitting one district against another to their own advantage.

For its part, the Metro staff soon saw the extreme difficulty of passing

judgment on budgets featuring wide variations for teachers' salaries. "I cannot imagine the borough boards maintaining a satisfactory relationship with each other if they remain in competition in the matter of teachers' salaries," McCordic said in a public speech. With a certain amount of gentle prodding, the teachers were gradually persuaded to move toward standard scales for the area. Under no legal compulsion, they began holding joint talks with their own school superintendents and members of the Metro board. In 1968 secondary and elementary school teachers, once characterized, respectively, as "Brahmins and untouchables," shared a common bargaining table for the first time.

In the end negotiating with Metro seemed the sensible and practical thing to do. After all, as Brooks conceded, "That's where the money is." The result is that elementary schools, through wholly voluntary action, now have virtually the same salary schedules throughout the area, and secondary schools are close to achieving the same result.

If Metro is vigorously promoting equality of opportunity, if Metro is in effect negotiating with the teachers, and if Metro is passing on budgets and fixing financial priorities on the basis of its own value judgments, what is left to the autonomous boards?

Ask a Metro official that question and he will tell you, as McCordic told me, "It is a matter of starting the process from the ground up rather than imposing it from above. Budgets originate locally, based on the local boards' philosophy and sense of their own communities. Their representatives on the Metro board have to defend those budgets and they may not get all they want, but the color and flavor of their respective systems are preserved." Variations, innovations, and competition are not only possible but encouraged. "We need this friendly, stimulating rivalry," Barry

Lowes said. "For if a grey smog of uniformity gradually settles over Metro, then we shall have failed."

Certainly Metro has had its critics and prophets of doom. City politicians were from the first given to rousing the electorate with reminders that Toronto contributed more in Metro school taxes than it ever received from the Metro board. Other critics argued that, unless a local board left a good deal of fat in its proposed budget, it would almost surely find itself shortchanged after the Metro board had done its job of paring. And there were always those who saw in any degree of centralization a forewarning of more to come.

The criticisms were hardly basic. Of course some districts give more than they get. That was the essence of the plan. An unequal distribution of dollars for the sake of real equality was one of its fundamental purposes. Yet, for all the complaining by city politicians, the fact is that few communities in the United States have done a better job than Metro of rebuilding and renewing the schools of their inner city. Parts of metropolitan Toronto would not have survived without it.

Add to these basic achievements the fact that Metro has succeeded in cutting down class size throughout the area, more or less satisfied the teachers, provided considerable improvement in facilities for handicapped pupils, and developed original and economic concepts of school construction; add further that in the first full year of the new Metro system not one local board was required to reduce its original budget, and it becomes apparent why such fears and criticisms as existed at the outset have grown fairly dim—dim enough for the reasonably cautious Barry Lowes to take office in 1969 with the words: "At the inaugural meeting two years ago... I asked the question that was on all our minds: 'Will Metro work?' A year ago I said that we still did not know!

Tonight I would like to preface my remarks by saying that, on the basis of evidence generated in 1968, the question is no longer relevant. The answer is obviously yes—a resounding yes!”

More subdued, but just as convincing, was the comment of Barry Zwicker, education writer of the *Toronto Star*: “Metro has worked out so well that not much is written about it.”

Will It Work Here?

How applicable is the Toronto experience, and the concept of federation, to the problems of the American school board? There are differences, to be sure, between the situation of Toronto and that of our own cities. The Canadian metropolis does not have quite the extensive poverty-in-the-midst-of-plenty that marks our greatest urban centers, nor has it the large Negro enclaves that pose for us the tremendously difficult problems of a damaging racial segregation. And, finally, Toronto’s suburbs prior to Metro were more in need of relief than the inner city, whose sources of revenue were not yet as inadequate as ours to keep pace with its mounting social needs.

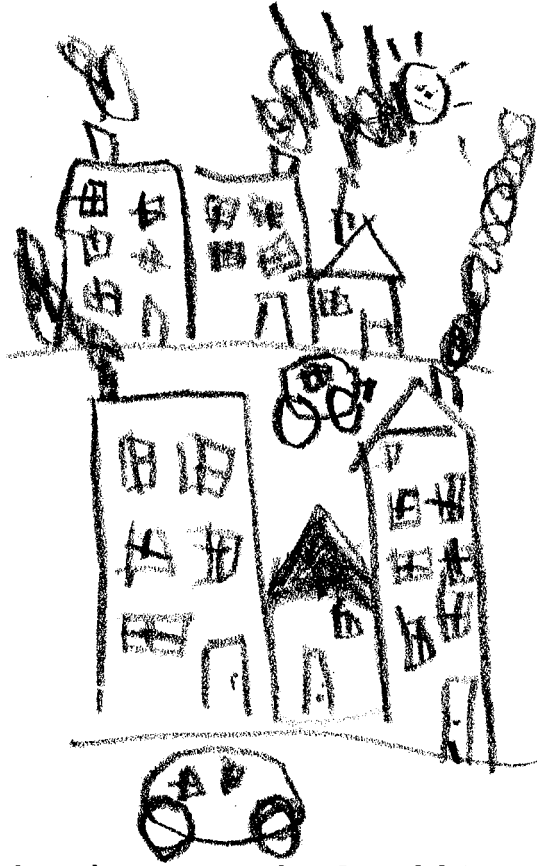
But to state these differences is merely to say that Toronto was at an earlier stage in the same process that afflicts our own big cities and that Metro may well have served to arrest its downward course. What is more, the balance in the United States is beginning to shift—with the suburbs, especially those closest to the line, beginning to show the symptoms of distress that have afflicted the inner city. The growth rate of the non-white population in the suburbs is already greater than it is in the central cities, producing the usual pattern of a white middle class fatuously fleeing to outer suburbia, with segregation, loss of local revenue, and decay resulting.

Meanwhile, even in outer suburbia itself, rejection of the school budget has almost become a rite of spring.

And collective bargaining, under threat of a teachers’ strike, is rapidly reducing school boards to a condition of chronic hysteria. Peter Schrag is surely right in his prediction that “suburban isolation is but a temporary luxury; ultimately the agony of the city will make itself felt in the periphery as well.” In any case, it is academic to debate whether public education is in greater ultimate danger on the inner or outer side of the city line, when it faces—on both sides—grave problems that can only be solved in cooperation.

To approach in a more positive way the question of Metro’s applicability, one need only picture to himself the workings of the two-tiered system in any of our cities—let us say Philadelphia, to choose one where we know there is a wide gap between what is spent on pupils in the central city and in the opulent areas surrounding it.

A Metro school board, if it had enough suburban representatives to balance those of Philadelphia proper, would have at its disposal tax money, assessed at a uniform rate, from the entire district—central city, Main Line, and all. And these it would distribute with an eye to equality of educational opportunity, which is not the same thing at all as guaranteeing to turn out equally educated Philadelphians, but only a step in the direction of social justice long deferred. Between core city and suburbs there would have to be that give-and-take which is a tempering force as well as a *modus operandi* in representative democracy rather than



the anarchic individualism that passes often enough nowadays as "participatory democracy."

New York City might well present special problems that would defy the Toronto solution. As a single district within a metropolitan scheme it would still have difficulty in governing its own far-flung system or even in representing it adequately on a common regional board. But the very existence of such a board would make it far more reasonable to break the city system into a number of autonomous districts, each of which would belong to the Metro system as a whole and be represented on its board. Decentralization under a centralized but representative authority would be the formula, with regional wealth and talents to draw on and regional space for maneuvering. Harlem would get some of Scarsdale's money,

but Scarsdale's member would have a check on what Harlem did with it. And vice versa.

Granted all the advantages of metropolitanism and the good sense of federation, there is no doubt that it would be somewhat lopsided in its benefits, at least for a while. It would profit the poor district at the expense of the rich, the city at the expense of the suburb, Chicago at the expense of Winnetka, Boston at the expense of Newton, Detroit at the expense of Grosse Point. The question arising from this circumstance is not a moral one—the only immorality is to continue allowing, as we do now, the accident of geography and available taxable wealth to determine a child's educational possibilities. The question is the hard practical one of how the Winnetkas, Newtons, and Grosse Points are to be persuaded to

enter into arrangements that would so obviously reduce their present advantage.

It is in the power of the states, subject to their various constitutional limitations, to do what needs to be done in the way of school redistricting, just as it fell to the Ontario government to force the metropolitan area system on the less than enthusiastic authorities of Toronto. But it is the legislatures that would have to act, and they are not inclined to coerce suburbia for the sake of the cities, even when their state constitutions permit.

What may force them to act, among other factors, is a possible ruling by the courts, in a pending Detroit case or some other suit, that present inequalities are a violation of the federal Constitution. In that event they could establish metropolitan area school districts without going so far as to impose complete Metro government. Indeed, Vermont and New Hampshire recently persuaded the United States Senate to pass a bill allowing them to merge school systems now separated by the state line. In most cases, no constitutional change would be required to introduce the carrot-and-stick technique invoked successfully by California's Unruh Act, which not only permits but encourages the merging of separate school districts by referendum. What can be used to bring town and town together could be used, so far as schools are concerned, to merge city and suburb.

Alan K. Campbell suggests that the cities themselves might do a little trading toward this end, agreeing to drop or defer a commuter tax, for example, or to let suburbs tap their water lines and make other such concessions in return for a coalition of some sort in the field of education. Even a decision to spend more money on schools than the suburbs do, if the money can be had, would make federation more inviting. In any such effort the city should be able to count

on the powerful support of its bankers, realtors, and industrialists, all of whom, as heavy taxpayers, have a lively interest in drawing suburban dollars into the school system in order to lighten their own load. Finally, there is the federal government, with an ample store of carrots to spend, through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare or the Department of Housing and Urban Development, on communities that strive in any imaginative way to improve the quality of city life—such as accepting a rational, in the end an inevitable, regional district for the improvement of their public schools.

In the end, however, it must be the people of the outlying areas themselves who come to grips with the problem—perhaps because they see the spreading blight of the cities encroaching on their places of suburban refuge. Or because they realize their dependence on, and their debt to, the city where they work and play but where they neither sleep nor pay taxes. Or even because they have awakened at long last to the moral wrong and imminent danger of allowing the children of the cities to grow up hurt and embittered.

If for these reasons, or any other, they accept their responsibilities as citizens of a metropolis, they may do more than solve the immediate problems of schools and school boards. It is more than just possible that they will have saved the city—and the suburb and the country with it. For the political entity of the city no longer coincides with the true locale of its people, the place where they both work and live. When that happens, government must gradually lose its grip and, in time, cease to govern. Looking at our worn and seething centers of frustration, no one can doubt that we have already moved into this downward spiral or that the saving of our schools is only one aspect of the larger and more desperate need to save our cities.■

Memo of the Month:

(This feature will recur as frequently as our readers supply us with appropriate examples.)

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

DATE: August 1, 1969

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: EGC:RL:RSH:ec

SUBJECT: Restricted Sick Leave List

TO: All Supervisors

The following is a reprint from a letter I received from the Philadelphia Regional Office under date of July 28, 1969. Please be guided accordingly.

Your attention is called to Postal Manual Section 721.435 which was issued on August 22, 1968, and which states the procedures required for placing an employee's name on such a list and removing it therefrom. Reference is also made to Postal Manual Section 721.434c in relation to the subject.