

POINTS OF VIEW

Signs of a struggle

Has teachers union lost its Lansing power base?

Question: As a Michigan teacher in today's atmosphere, I feel we teachers are being looked upon as incompetent and greedy. House Bill 3128 (now Public Act 112) which literally does away with negotiations is a clear sign that Gov. John Engler and those legislators who voted for the bill are out to destroy our profession. Teacher bashing seems to be at an all-time high. What are your perceptions regarding what is happening in education in Michigan?

Answer:

A major battle has been waged between Engler, some legislators and the MEA. The MEA believes this movement is to destroy the union; Engler and many legislators believe the MEA has become too strong and there is a need for a "Balance of Power."

The MEA, which has represented teachers superbly over the years, doesn't wish to give up the rights, salaries and conditions it has negotiated since 1965. Engler and many Lansing lawmakers believe they represent the majority of Michigan taxpayers citizens who want a stronger voice in teacher salaries and working conditions.

This power struggle was really inevitable. Everything seems to cycle and recycle in this world.

This is the same power struggle I experienced as president of the Plymouth Teachers Association (dues \$5) back in the '60s. We had zero power. The officers met a couple times a year. Frankly we didn't know there was a power base to go after. We were public servants and frankly, most of us were quite happy; maybe dumb, but happy.

You see, prior to 1965, there were no negotiations; we were told we were getting a 2 percent raise (that was about \$100) and that was it. Case closed!

We were told when and where we would have lunch room duty, hall duty, school dance duty, parking lot duty (no stipend) and we did it. I coached the golf team at Grose Ile for free golf on caddy day.

But some of us began thinking... is this fair? My high school dropout classmate, a truck driver, was making \$7,800 while I was making \$3,900.

So we borrowed a contract from the City of New York AFT (American Federation of Teachers) and were shocked to discover teachers did have some rights.

We stood on the steps of the Capitol Building in Lansing and demanded the right to negotiate. And indeed did win the right and negotiated a \$1,300 teacher raise... a huge jump from \$100 or \$150 in each of the previous five years.



Doc Doyle

■ The Michigan Education Association, which has represented teachers superbly over the years, doesn't wish to give up the rights, salaries and conditions it has negotiated since 1965. Gov. John Engler and many Lansing lawmakers believe they represent the majority of Michigan taxpayers citizens who want a stronger voice in teacher salaries and working conditions.

It all played out and Michigan teachers rightfully won their battle for decent wages, benefits, sick days and pay for extra-curricular activities.

Like it or not the pendulum has now swung. Many citizens are tired of teacher strikes that they say hold the public hostage. Many people who have supported education in the past, i.e., IBM professionals I know, have been laid off.

The balance of power issue which, as teachers, we fought for in 1965 has again raised its head. Unfortunately, we now have some legislators who want to turn the clock back to 1903 and make indentured servants out of teachers and MEA representatives.

On the other hand we have some "teachers" who think the battle of the overpass at the Rouge Plant is still going on. That's not a balance; that's insane.

The question is: "Has the MEA lost its Lansing power base?" If the MEA has, the power base will obviously dissipate at the local level. Teachers could be taken back to 1964 when, with hat in hand, we shuffled our feet on the superintendent's carpet hoping for a 1 or 2 percent raise.

You ask what my perceptions are. If the teacher voting block and teacher supporters remove enough of those legislators from office who supported HB

6128 (the negotiation bill), the MEA could emerge as strong as they presently are.

If the MEA and its voting constituency don't remove those legislators who have deserted them, it indicates to me a major shift in power.

It means many citizens... who, at one time, supported teachers and thus the MEA have now moved into Engler's camp.

What is most unfortunate is that the great majority of teachers and school administrators are decent human beings, people committed to children and to education.

And the vast majority of teachers will continue to perform well on a daily basis regardless of the power struggle. Indeed, some of the abuse dedicated teachers are taking on radio shows is totally unfair.

The MEA and Engler are in a major power struggle. Yet that power struggle in our democracy is what makes this the greatest country on the face of the earth.

James 'Doc' Doyle is a former administrator in the West Bloomfield, Troy and Plymouth-Canton school districts. He is now an educational consultant and a regular contributor to the Points of View page. You can leave him a message from a Touch-Tone phone at 953-2047, mailbox 1856.

LETTERS

Get us Involved

I am a concerned citizen who believes that no matter how old I am, I should be able to at least give my opinion about something that might affect me.

In this case my opinion is about the possible use of nuclear power by the military in North Korea, and whether we should get involved to stop them.

In my opinion, we should get involved.

I think we should get involved because the United States is considered

to be a "world power," and this situation can affect the world very badly.

Just think, if they were to use nuclear energy to make bombs and actually launched them, that would give off lots of radiation poisoning that would last for generations, not to mention how many innocent people would be wiped from existence.

Another reason I believe we should get involved is because if we don't stop them, then some of our "enemies" including North Korea, will see us as not taking a stand and feel safe to do the same thing.

North Korea has already started sell-

ing missile technology to Iran and Libya. As you can see, North Korea is trying to push us as far as they can. Either they think they can get an armistice agreement, or they think they will be able to get away with it, and we should not give them either.

One more reason we should get involved is because we can't do anything else. We can't impose economic sanctions against North Korea, and we can't order a naval blockade either because either act, they said, would be taken as an act of war anyway.

If we don't do anything, no one else will, because with nuclear weapons,

other countries are in the position to be attacked, so it's mainly up to us. Whatever we do, we should do it quickly and efficiently before it's too late.

Beth A. Weingarden,
Farmington Hills

Thanks a lot

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Farmington Observer for helping to make our AARP Tax-Aide Program — Tax Counseling for

the Elderly — a success for another year.

We prepared 140 joint returns out of 683 separate interviews. Four hundred and 15 federal tax and 1,067 state tax and credit forms were prepared.

Tax-related assistance was given to 107 clients. Eleven senior citizens were given tax assistance at their residences because of ill health.

Again, thank you for placing the notices in the Farmington Observer, noting the time and place of tax assistance each week during the tax season.

John J. Antonilli, local coordinator,
Farmington-Farmington Hills

Thoughts on guns, MEAPs and idling over judgeships

Pulling together some loose ends:

■ Tom Washington, Michigan's contribution to the National Rifle Association, is the most unusual and best person I've run into in the natural resources ranks.

Washington, raised in Dearborn, is executive director of the Michigan United Conservation Clubs. He's a rarity because he (1) is an old-fashioned hunter and fisherman, the Teddy Roosevelt types that begat the conservation movement, and (2) has a foot in the modern environmental movement, populated by bird watchers, tree huggers, hikers and other believers in non-consumptive enjoyment of natural resources.

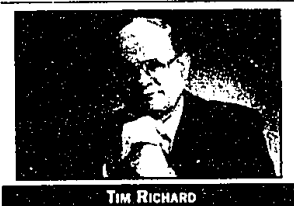
Members of group 2 frequently sneer at Washington as some kind of red-neck, particularly since he will now head NRA. Actually both groups need to talk to each other and read each other's literature. MUCC's magazine publishes both kinds of articles. It's why the centrist MUCC has more political clout than the leftist environmental groups.

In the State Capitol, Washington has championed the ban on throwaways, the natural resources trust fund, the attack on Gov. John Engler's reorganization of the Department of Natural Resources, and the current rejuvenation of state park funding, as well as the traditional fish-and-fur issues.

Washington, as NRA chief, is the person best qualified to straighten out the effete, impudent, intellectual snobs who populate the District of Columbia's news bureaus. Pay attention: The gun issue isn't crime control. It's about Big Brother wanting to keep entire populations under his weighty thumb. To run a dictatorship, you first must disarm the populace.

Washington has a multi-century and world view of guns. He will need to make that view respected.

■ A Michigan Education Association type sent along some ideas to "Reform Lansing." Most are predictable fulminations against the Legislature for curbing the union's misuse of power, but one deserves comment: "All legislators and the governor shall take



Tim Richard

the high school MEAP test in reading, math and science... Politicians who do not pass will not receive 'endorsed public servant' status. Beginning in 1997, anyone who does not pass all three tests will be terminated from office."

That's a good one, similar to my suggestion that legislators should be able to pass a civil service test. Unfortunately, it will take a major state constitutional amendment.

You see, the Michigan Constitution says a legislator "must be a citizen of the United States, at least 21 years of age, and an elector of the district he represents" (Art. IV, sec. 7) — in other words, a registered voter. But federal law says states can't impose literacy tests on people wishing to register.

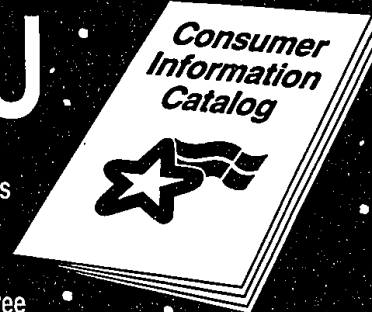
So without a constitutional amendment, no MEAP tests for politicians. Sorry, MEA — you flunk civics this week.

■ Boo and raspberries to the Legislature for dawdling 17 months on a bill to establish new judgeships. Filing deadline for judicial candidates was May 10. Lawmakers didn't decide to add circuit judges in Oakland and Cheboygan counties until this May 24-25. To get candidates, they had to push the filing deadline back to May 27, almost screwing up the elections process.

That bill could have been passed back in February of 1993.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. You can reach him by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1881.

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