

# Faculty and Staff Look At Their Roles In Governance

By Gregory M. Saltzman and Janet Grenzke

In 1997, NEA President Bob Chase called on teachers to adopt “New Unionism.” He explained as follows:

Our challenge is clear: Instead of relegating teachers to the role of production workers—with no say in organizing their schools for excellence—we need to enlist teachers as full partners, indeed, as co-managers of their schools.

Instead of contracts that reduce flexibility and restrict change, we—and our schools—need contracts that empower and enable.

This new collaboration is not about sleeping with the enemy. It is about waking up to our shared stake in reinvigorating the public education enterprise. It is about educating children better, more effectively, more ambitiously.<sup>1</sup>

Chase was speaking about elementary and secondary education, but

the New Unionism model is relevant to college and university education, too. This is the focus of this study, which examines participation by unionized college and university employees in institutional governance issues.

In the traditional union model, labor is the adversary of management on issues of wages, hours, and employment conditions. But labor traditionally cedes to management the right to make strategic decisions unilaterally, subject only to an obligation to bargain with the union—after a decision is made—about the impact of these decisions on wages, hours, and employment conditions.

When he became president of the AFL-CIO in 1955, George Meany summarized this ceding of authority as follows:

Those matters that do not touch a worker directly, a union cannot and will not challenge. These may include investment

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policy, a decision to make a new product, a desire to erect a new plant so as to be closer to expanding markets. But where management decisions affect a worker directly, a union will intervene.<sup>2</sup>

Put another way, "the guiding principle of collective bargaining has been 'management manages and the union grieves.'"<sup>3</sup>

The limitations of this traditional model have led labor leaders in both education and other sectors to consider a new model of unionism, in which labor and management collaborate as strategic partners.

On the one hand, this new approach replaces adversarial relationships with cooperation. On the other, labor gains influence over key management decisions that previously would have been considered outside the scope of bargaining. In a business context, these might be called entrepreneurial decisions. In a college or university context, they are typically called governance issues.

The rationale for this strategic partnership approach:

Effective representation requires planning and participation in decisions before they are made rather than just formal negotiations over their effects after the fact. And for competi-

tive reasons employers need increased trust, commitment, and cooperation at the workplace rather than further institutionalization of adversarial relationships.<sup>4</sup>

This rationale that underlies the call for New Unionism in education has also been accepted by some union leaders in other sectors.

A prominent example was Irv Bluestone, who sought a strategic partnership between labor and management in the 1970s and early 1980s when he was United Auto Workers (UAW) vice president in charge of negotiations with General Motors (GM).

**I**n the mid-1980s, such a partnership developed, as GM allowed UAW members to become deeply involved in planning the Saturn project. Union members participated in decisions on product design, marketing approaches, and allocation of capital investments that would be decided unilaterally by company managers in other GM divisions.

In turn, the UAW granted management considerable flexibility in assigning workers to various job duties. The UAW also agreed to link pay to productivity and made a commitment to quality. In Bluestone's vision, "Quality is a 'strikeable' issue."<sup>5</sup>

## The percentage of faculty who felt their administration was autocratic rose to 69 percent in 1989.

Bluestone contends that employee input in strategic decisions can contribute to the success of an organization, thereby protecting jobs. Moreover, he sees adoption of strategic partnerships between labor and management as advancing the cause of economic democracy.<sup>6</sup>

In colleges and universities, New Unionism may entail, in part, an increase in employee participation in college or university governance.

The Carnegie Foundation survey of faculty in 1975, 1984, and 1989 found that, increasingly, most faculty felt that the administration at their institution was autocratic rather than democratic.

Specifically, the percentage of faculty who felt their administration was “somewhat autocratic” or “very autocratic” rose from 61 percent in 1975 to 67 percent in 1984 and 69 percent in 1989.<sup>7</sup>

Schuster, et. al., did case studies of eight institutions, one of which was unionized. Each had a joint committee of administrators and faculty to make important governance decisions. They noted that, at the unionized university,

a mature collective bargaining unit played a strong and positive role in decision making. Without maturity, the appropriate lines between decisions

appropriate for collective bargaining and “normal” governance decisions may not be sufficiently clear to allow for an effective strategic governance process to emerge.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, Rhoades noted: “Traditional models of shared governance in the academy have separated budgetary, fiduciary, and even strategic decision-making matters—the realm of administrators—from academic and curricular matters—the realm of faculty.”<sup>9</sup>

**H**is analysis of 212 collective bargaining contracts for faculty indicated that:

- fewer than half required consultation with the union or faculty prior to retrenchment,<sup>10</sup>
- fewer than a quarter required involvement of full-time faculty in hiring or firing of part-time faculty,<sup>11</sup>
- only a handful required faculty involvement in decisions to utilize new technology.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Saltzman and Sperka noted there was an unsuccessful attempt in Michigan in 1995 to enact legislation narrowing the scope of bargaining in state colleges and universities.<sup>13</sup> One aim of this proposed legislation was to limit the role of faculty in governance.

This article presents findings from two new national surveys.

## This article presents new data on faculty attitudes towards participation in college and university governance.

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The authors wrote the questions in these surveys, and Abacus Associates conducted the survey.

We surveyed two populations: first, NEA higher education members and, second, leaders of NEA higher education local chapters. Telephone interviewers attempted to reach a representative national sample of each population in calls between April 14 and May 4, 1998.

**N**inety-four percent of those contacted agreed to be interviewed, resulting in sample sizes of 600 members and 146 local current or recent local presidents.

Ninety-one respondents in the member sample (about 15 percent) were rank-and-file educational support personnel (ESP); the rest were mostly faculty.<sup>14</sup>

Members were asked a variety of questions about their attitudes towards participation in college or university governance and traditional vs. consensus approaches to bargaining.

Association leaders were asked the same set of questions about their attitudes. In addition, leaders were asked about the actual extent of participation in governance and whether a traditional or consensus approach to bargaining was used in the last round of union contract negotiations.

Questions about actual rather than preferred practices were

asked of leaders instead of rank-and-file members on the assumption that leaders would be better informed, on average, than members about actual governance practices and the nature of recent contract negotiations.

Using the data from this survey, this article presents more detailed information about attitudes towards participation in college and university governance than has been previously published.

This survey is also the first, to our knowledge, that allows an analysis of the relationship between attitudes towards participation in college and university governance and the actual extent of participation in governance.

Most of the attitudinal questions asked, "Would you like the faculty to be much more involved, somewhat more involved, involved at the same level, somewhat less involved, or much less involved in" [policy area], where various policy areas were designated.

Support staff respondents were asked about involvement of support staff rather than faculty, and they were also asked a question about subcontracting that was not asked of faculty. The policy areas are shown in Table 1, which lists them in order of priority, based on members' responses.

As Table 1 indicates, allocating the institution's budget, setting the

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## The top priority for higher ed support staff was greater involvement in making decisions about new technology.

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percentage of part-time and non-tenure track faculty, and making salary decisions regarding merit pay and equity issues were the three policy areas in which NEA higher education members most wanted greater involvement.

Although not shown in Table 1, NEA local chapter leaders had the same first, second, and third priorities as the members, and the remainder of the leaders' and members' priorities were similar. The top priority for support staff members was greater involvement in making decisions about new technology, which ranked fourth for the faculty.

Faculty gave low priority to greater involvement in the addition or deletion of courses, hiring new faculty, or selecting department chairs. This low priority, however, probably reflects the already high level of actual faculty involvement in these areas, rather than a sense that involvement in these areas is unimportant.

Support staff in our national sample put a low priority on greater involvement in subcontracting work previously done by institution employees. Given that privatization has been a hot issue on many campuses, this latter result is hard to explain.

The distributions of faculty responses for each question on involvement are shown in Figure 1, while support staff responses are

shown in Figure 2. What is most striking about both figures is that very few rank-and-file members, whether faculty or support staff, wanted less involvement in policy decisions.

This was also true for local leaders. For most of the policy areas, a majority of each group wanted somewhat more or much more involvement, rather than the same level of involvement.

**S**ixty-six percent of faculty and 79 percent of local chapter leaders wanted much more or somewhat more faculty involvement in budget allocation. But separate survey questions showed that majorities of both groups were satisfied with faculty access to information about their institution's budget.

Twenty-four percent of faculty and 22 percent of leaders were "very satisfied" with faculty access to budget information, while 67 percent of faculty and 56 percent of leaders were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied."

Leaders generally indicated more interest in greater faculty involvement in policy areas than faculty did. Similarly, rank-and-file members who were faculty were more likely to want greater involvement if they had ever served as a local union officer.

This attitudinal difference

might have two causes. First, serving as a local union leader may make faculty more aware of the

importance of involvement in governance decisions. Second, there may be a selection effect. The type

TABLE 1

Governance Policy Areas, Ranked by Member Preferences for Greater Involvement

| Rank | Policy Area—Faculty and Leader Surveys   | Policy Area—Support Staff Survey                                  |
|------|--|---|
| 1    | Allocating the institution's budget among major categories, such as salaries, buildings, athletics | Same  |
| 2    | Setting the percentage of part-time and nontenure-track faculty at your institution                | Setting the percentage of part-time employees at your institution |
| 3    | Making salary decisions regarding merit pay and equity issues                                      | Same  |
| 4    | Making major decisions about new technology such as distance learning                              | Making major decisions about new technologies                     |
| 5    | Selecting a president or chancellor  | NA  |
| 6    | Addition or deletion or academic programs  | Addition or deletion of programs, departments, or major services  |
| 7    | Selecting a provost or dean  | Same  |
| 8    | Developing criteria for tenure decisions   | NA  |
| 9    | Determining faculty workload   | Determining the workload of support staff                         |
| 10   | Addition or deletion or courses  | NA  |
| 11   | Hiring new faculty   | Hiring new support staff  |
| 12   | Selecting department chairs  | Same  |
| 13   | Approving sabbaticals  | Same  |
| 14   | Making individual tenure decisions   | NA  |
| 15   | NA   | Subcontracting work previously done by institution employees      |

Priority ranks based on mean value for responsiveness of all rank-and-file members, including both faculty and ESP. Means were calculated by coding responses so that 1 = "much more involved" and 5 = "much less involved." Mean for budget allocation was 2.01 (very close to "somewhat more involved"). Mean for subcontracting was 2.42 (between "somewhat more involved" and "involved at the same level").

NA = not asked of this group.

of person who wants to be involved in governance is more likely to become a local union leader.

Rank-and-file members who were nonwhite, particularly faculty, had a greater desire than other groups for more involvement. This finding is consistent with other studies showing greater support for union representation among Blacks than among whites.<sup>15</sup>

There was also a greater desire for more involvement among rank-and-file members who worked at institutions that had agency shop or fair share contracts or had experienced serious budgetary prob-

lems, resulting in significant cutbacks, within the past five years.

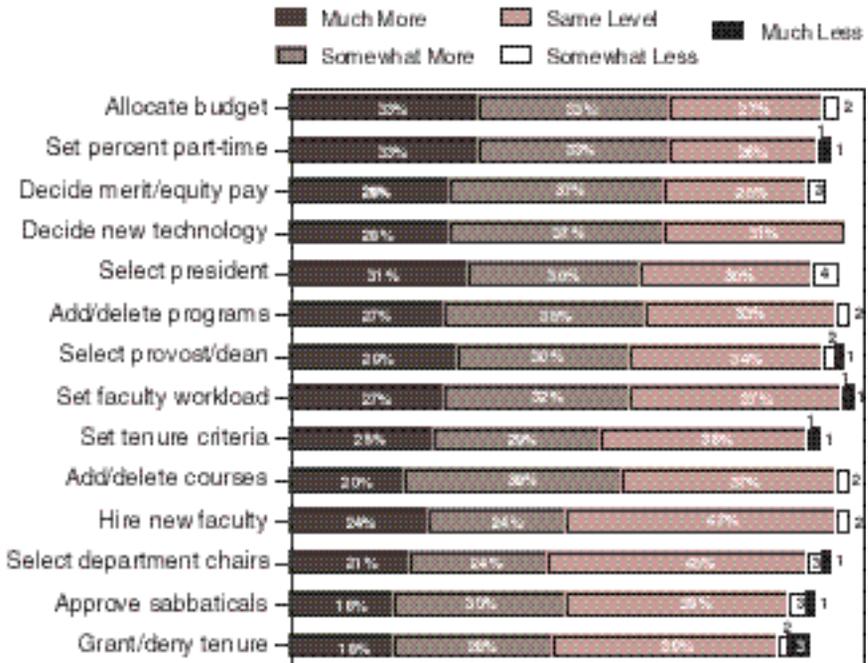
But leaders reported that the actual extent of faculty involvement in decision making was less in institutions that had experienced budget problems and cutbacks.

Leaders were asked about the actual faculty involvement that they currently saw at their institution for each of the policy areas in Table 1, except subcontracting. They were also asked if decisions in each policy area were made:

- Mostly by the administration,
- Jointly by the administration and faculty, or

FIGURE 1

Faculty's Preferred Level of Involvement in Governance



Remainder "Not Sure"

• Mostly by the faculty.  
 The distributions of leaders' assessments of current involvement in each policy area are shown in Figure 3.

A comparison of Figures 1 and 3 shows that faculty wanted more involvement in precisely those policy areas where leaders, on average, reported that faculty involvement was least.

Similarly, there was a strong correlation between leaders' desire for more faculty involvement in policy at their institution and leaders' perception that faculty involvement at their institution was low.

The three areas with the lowest current involvement—budget allocation, setting the part-time and

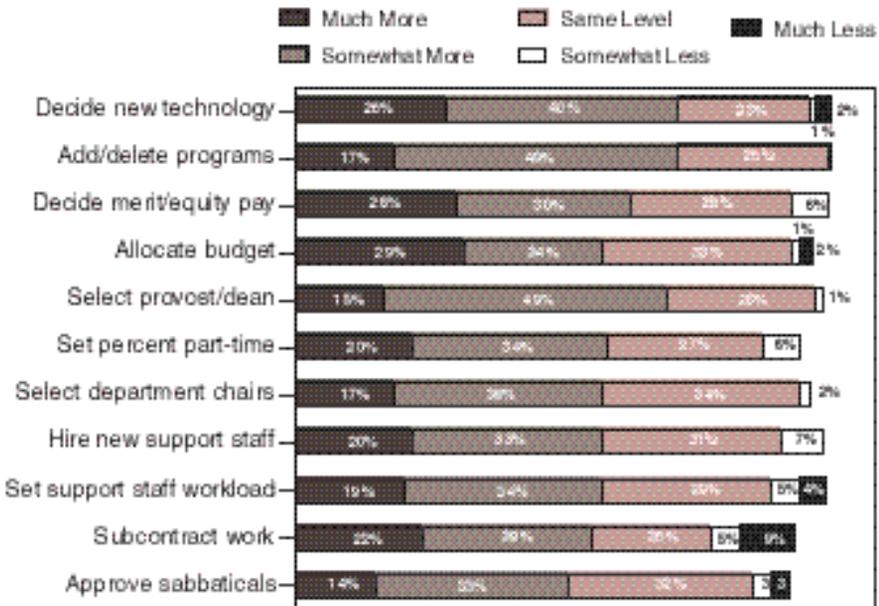
non-tenure track percentage, and merit pay/salary equity—were the top three priorities for greater involvement.

Collective bargaining generally seemed to increase the actual level of faculty involvement in governance decisions. Consider, for example, budget allocation decisions. Four percent of NEA leaders from institutions with collective bargaining contracts reported that budget decisions were made mostly by the faculty, 34 percent reported that decisions were made jointly, and 59 percent reported that decisions were made mostly by the administration.

In contrast, none of the NEA leaders from institutions without

FIGURE 2

Support Staff's Preferred Level of Involvement in Governance



Remainder "Not Sure"

collective bargaining contracts reported that budget decisions were made mostly by the faculty, only 18 percent reported jointly, and 74 percent reported mostly by the administration. Patterns were similar for most of the other policy areas.

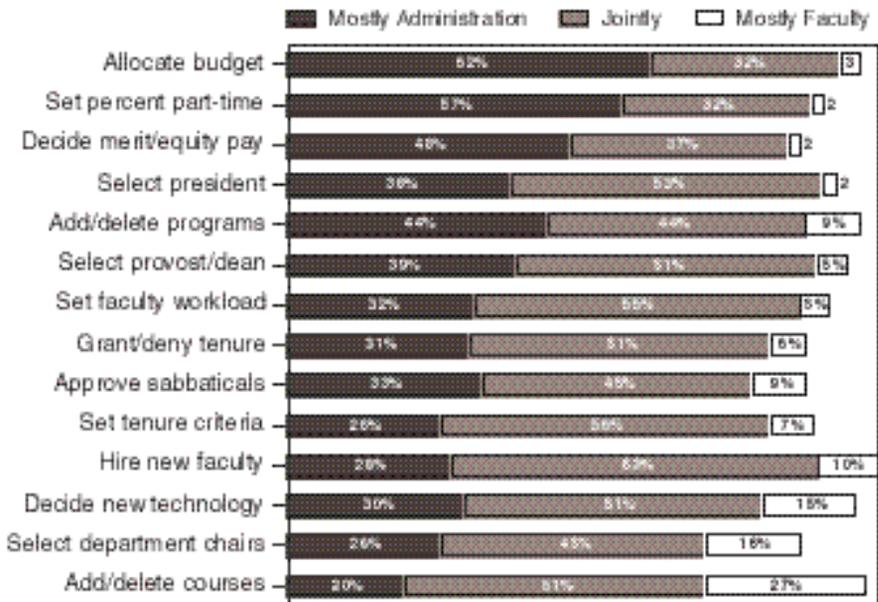
Still, in two policy areas with low levels of faculty involvement—setting the percentage of part-time and nontenure track faculty and making decisions related to merit pay and pay equity—actual faculty involvement was lower in institutions with collective bargaining contracts than in institutions without them.

The survey also asked respondents whether they thought that at

least one faculty or support staff member should serve on their institution’s governing board. They were also asked whether at least one faculty or support staff member actually served on the board.

Results for these questions are shown in Table 2. At about half of colleges and universities with an NEA chapter—a group in which community colleges are heavily represented but research universities are not—at least one faculty member serves on the governing board of the institution. Support staff appear to serve on the board in somewhat less than half of these institutions, although the large number of “Not sure” responses may have affected this figure.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Leaders Describe Current Faculty Involvement**



Remainder “Not Sure”

Over 80 percent of faculty thought there should be at least one faculty member on the board, and local NEA chapter leaders had similar views. Almost as high a percentage of support staff (74 percent) wanted a support staff member on the board. Thus, college and university employees are more likely to want representation on the institution's governing board than to have it.

How much difference board representation would make is unclear. On the one hand, union leaders serving on the governing board may be co-opted: They may place less emphasis on "bread-and butter issues, such as job security, that are of direct interest to the rank and file...[as they] meet with top management in elegant surroundings."<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, because many college and university employees are well educated and experienced in speaking in front of groups, they may be more effective

than typical union members would be in influencing board decisions.

Association leaders were asked whether the union negotiated evaluation criteria for faculty, class size, curriculum changes, and budget allocation. Results are shown in Table 3.

As can be seen, unions were most likely to negotiate over criteria for faculty evaluation, and least likely to negotiate over allocating the institution's budget. Still, almost a third of NEA higher ed leaders reported that their local unions negotiated over budget allocation.

Participation in discussions over educational or managerial policy issues shown in Table 3 were somewhat less common among locals that had a collective bargaining agreement, which suggests that college and university administrators may be more willing to discuss such issues if those discussions are informal and will not result in a binding contract.

TABLE 2

### Faculty and ESP Representation on College and University Governing Boards

|          | Is there at least one faculty (support staff) member on your institution's governing board? |     |         | Should there be at least one faculty (support staff) member on your institution's governing board? |     |         |
|----------|---|-----|---------|--|-----|---------|
|          | Faculty   | ESP | Leaders | Faculty  | ESP | Leaders |
| Yes      | 51%   | 39% | 52%     | 82%  | 74% | 83%     |
| No       | 28%   | 28% | 43%     | 10%  | 10% | 15%     |
| Not sure | 21%   | 33% | 5%      | 8%   | 16% | 3%      |

Rank-and-file members who were faculty and NEA local leaders were asked about faculty members on the board. Rank-and-file members who were ESP were asked about support staff on the board.

For all four issues, the union was less likely to negotiate if the institution had experienced serious budgetary problems, resulting in significant cutbacks within the last five years. Whether cutbacks lead to a narrow scope of bargaining, or a narrow scope of bargaining makes it easier for administrators to make cutbacks, is unclear.

The survey also addressed two approaches to bargaining: traditional bargaining, "where parties exchange formal proposals in writing and use a bottom-line strategy" and consensus bargaining, where "each side comes to the table with common problems to be jointly solved through a partnership between the administration and employees." (The definitions given to respondents in the survey.)

In order to ensure the validity of the survey results, respondents were read the following arguments made by advocates of both types of bargaining:

"Proponents of traditional bargaining argue that under consensus bargaining, the administration,

with its superior bargaining skills, will take advantage of the union and co-opt its leaders. Proponents of consensus bargaining argue that traditional bargaining leads to unnecessary conflict and is less effective in promoting employee interests."

Association leaders and members were both asked which approach they thought was more effective, traditional bargaining or consensus bargaining. Leaders were also asked whether they would characterize the last contract negotiations as traditional or consensus bargaining. Results are shown in Table 4.

The results indicate that both leaders and rank-and-file members prefer consensus bargaining. Subgroup analysis (not shown in Table 4) indicates that consensus bargaining was more popular among newer NEA members and leaders than among those who had belonged to the NEA for many years.

Among NEA local leaders, Democrats were about evenly split

TABLE 3  
Union Negotiations on Educational and Managerial Policy Issues

| Do you negotiate on each of the following issues? | Criteria for faculty evaluation | Class size | Change in the curriculum or new academic programs | Allocating the institution's budget |
|---|---------------------------------|------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Yes   | 66%                             | 49%        | 41%   | 32%                                 |
| No  | 32%                             | 45%        | 56%   | 65%                                 |
| Not sure  | 2%                              | 5%         | 3%  | 3%                                  |

Data Source: Survey of NEA local chapter leaders.

as to the type of bargaining that was more effective, while leaders who were Republicans (a much smaller group) thought that consensus bargaining was more effective by the overwhelming margin of 77 percent to 11 percent.

Similarly, male leaders were about evenly split as to which type was more effective, while female leaders thought that consensus bargaining was more effective by a margin of 75 percent to 22 percent.

Despite the majority preference for consensus bargaining, traditional bargaining is more common. Traditional bargaining was more common in four-year colleges than in community colleges or universities, in single-campus institutions than in multi-campus institutions, and in institutions that had experienced cutbacks in the past five years.

What was the impact of consensus bargaining on the actual extent of faculty participation in governance issues? Multiple regression results indicate the following:

Leaders who reported that their union used consensus bargaining tended to report lower levels of actual participation in governance. This result is contrary to the Saturn model that Irv Bluestone has promoted.

Possibly, consensus bargaining weakened unions in colleges and universities. This possibility is consistent with the recent vote in the UAW Saturn local to replace the long-serving local leaders who had advocated a strategic partnership with GM, electing instead new leaders who advocated traditional adversarial bargaining.

The Saturn election followed a decision by local union leaders in the summer of 1998, when a strike at GM parts factories shut down most GM assembly plants, to allow management to use parts from nonunion Japanese companies to keep the Saturn plant open.<sup>17</sup>

It is also possible that causality runs the other way: Less powerful local Associations may have been more likely to choose consensus

TABLE 4

Traditional Bargaining Versus Consensus Bargaining:  
Perceived Effectiveness and Extent of Use

|                        | Which type do you think is more effective? |         |     |               | Would you characterize the last contract negotiations as traditional bargaining or consensus bargaining? (asked of leaders) |
|------------------------|--|---------|-----|---------------|---|
|                        | Rank-and-File Members                      |         |     | Local Leaders |   |
|                        | Overall                                    | Faculty | ESP |               |   |
| Traditional bargaining | 31%  | 31%     | 35% | 36%           | 57%   |
| Consensus bargaining   | 57%  | 57%     | 57% | 58%           | 42%   |
| Other/not sure         | 11%  | 12%     | 7%  | 6%            | 1%  |

rather than traditional bargaining. If that is the case, then it may be a lack of power that leads to both a limited faculty role in institutional governance and a reluctance of the local union to confront the administration as an adversary.

Perhaps one lesson for unions in colleges and universities is that participation in institutional governance is a potentially effective way to advance employee interests. But the union must take steps to maintain or increase its power so that a strategic partnership is genuine rather than a method of co-optation.

Another lesson, based on the recent election at the Saturn local, is that union leaders must stay aware of rank-and-file viewpoints and must carefully explain potentially controversial decisions to the rank and file.

Finally, it should be noted that the conclusions in this study apply chiefly to public-sector colleges and universities. In private, nonprofit colleges and universities, faculty (but not support staff) face the "Yeshiva trap."

If faculty at private, nonprofit institutions achieve a substantial role in institutional governance, then the U.S. Supreme Court considers them bosses rather than workers, and they lose their legally protected right to organize and bargain.<sup>18</sup> The Yeshiva doctrine, however, seems unlikely to spread to the public sector.<sup>19</sup>

Participation in institutional governance thus poses no threat to the union rights of faculty in public colleges and universities or of support staff in either public or private universities. ■

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Chase, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in Heckscher, 1988, 59.
- <sup>3</sup> McKersie, 1985, 149.
- <sup>4</sup> Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986, 231.
- <sup>5</sup> Bluestone and Bluestone, 1992, 26.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>7</sup> Carnegie Foundation, 1989, 124, Chart 32.
- <sup>8</sup> Schuster, et al., 1994, 188.
- <sup>9</sup> Rhoades, 1998, 271.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-144.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>13</sup> Saltzman and Sperka, 1999, 22.
- <sup>14</sup> Further details about the survey methodology and cross-tabulations of the data are presented in Abacus Associates, 1998.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, Saltzman, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> McKersie, 1985, 151.

<sup>17</sup> Bradsher, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *NLRB v. Yeshiva University*, 444 U.S. 672 (1980).

<sup>19</sup> Saltzman, 1998, 50.

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