Francoise Mercier: Questions for end of Chapter 17: *Professional issues in nursing: Challenges and opportunities,* (Eds. 2nd). Carol J. Huston, author.

1. Does the presence of unions increase the likelihood that management will be fairer and more consistent with employees?

Ans.: History will reveal that the presence of unions does increase the likelihood that management will be fairer and more consistent with employees based on the gains that workers have received due to unionization. For example, in some of the earliest strikes held by printers, shoemakers, and carpenters in the late 1790s to early 1800s resulted with modest increases in wages for workers (Huston, 2010, p.288). On the other hand, the power of management sometimes overrode the attempts of workers to get better working conditions. A group of journeymen boot-makers and shoe-makers who refused to work in an attempt to improve their working conditions were put on trial in Philadelphia in 1806 and convicted of criminal conspiracy (Online Highways, 2011). These convictions set the tone for management/labor relations and the reaction of management in many instances was repression, the use of trickery, and often violence without reprisal (Huston, p.288). In ending, the chief aim of capitalism which is to maximize profits will always put workers at risk for exploitation, which from a historical perspective is especially exemplified because of the use of chattel slavery as one of the major modes of operation for business which fueled the beginnings of economic growth in this country. Therefore, workers will always benefit from recognizing themselves as a group who needs to look after their individual and collective self interest the same way as management. The history of management’s ferocious attempts to discourage the organizing of labor points to the fact that labor unions are obviously effective.

1. How do you feel about the AAUP dividing the organization into three distinctive parts with separate activities – collective bargaining, academic support, and fund raising? Would a similar model work for the ANA?

Ans.: The AAUP’s division of the organization into three distinctive parts with separate activities was obvious a good move because the concerns of the profession can best be handled by breaking down the work into separate act ivies in order to achieve maximum effects. A visit to their website reveals some of the benefits of functioning in the manner. For example, under the collective bargaining entity, members in the AAUP have the opportunity to benefit from attending their Collective Bargaining Congress where, “Participants analyze common problems and discuss solutions they have devised to those problems. The Summer Institute and supplemental training workshops address such topics as negotiations and membership recruitment as well as the “nitty gritty” interests of faculty and other academic professionals—evaluating medical benefits, maintaining relationships with the press, addressing equity complaints, establishing intellectual property rights, and so forth” (AAUP, 2012)..

A similar model might work for the ANA because of similar concerns regarding such things as academic freedom, government relations, and shared governance to name a few which exist for both professions. Settling conflicts between management and nursing ethics and professional goals take a lot of energy and focus which can detract from developing collective bargaining agreements which are satisfactory for nurses and the nursing profession. Breaking the issues in nursing down into separate entities will provide intense focus on problem solving and allow members to lend their energy and assistance to issues that they are most concerned about.

1. Can the need for unionization be eliminated simply by management being more attentive to worker needs and being willing to provide employees reasonable working conditions and a voice in decision making?

Ans.: In my opinion, the history of how labor is treated in this country as well as in the world makes it very unlikely that if unionization can be eliminated by management being more attentive to workers needs etc. I say this because of the dynamics of business. For example, the original owner of a company may have humanistic values and thus, be fair to employees. If he or she sells the company, or dies the new owner may not have the same values and might view profits as the king regardless of how workers are treated. Unionization will always be needed to protect workers by management will always have their own aims, concerns, and objectives.

1. Would you be willing to cross a picket line to work during and authorized strike?

Ans.: Yes, if human lives were put in jeopardy by an authorized strike.

1. Are there other ways nurses can increase their group power other than by unions? If so, are they as effective?

Ans.: The major other way that professional groups use to increase their power other than unions are professional organizations which according to Hovekamp (1997), “AsGalaskiewicz (1985) notes, “one of the latent functions of professional associations is to put people together in committees, panels, task forces, and study groups who might not otherwise be attracted to one another based on their background characteristics alone” (p. 640). Aconsequence of such interactions is the establishment of a unified culture for the profession, the institutionalization of professional codes of contact, establishment of educational and performance standards, and the diffusion and incorporation of change and innovation within the profession” (p.233-234). However, as Hovekamp also points out, there can be conflict within the hierarchy of the organizational structure pitting persons who are professionals yet managers and professionals who are workers (p.234). Therefore, professional organizations are good for developing the professions itself while unions are best used for dealing with concerns with how work is managed. According to Mishel & Walters (2003), “Historically, unions have raised the wages to a greater degree for “low-skilled” than for “high-skilled” workers. Consequently, unions lessen wage inequality”. However, the fact that the AAUP was formed speaks to the need for unions for white collar or professional workers.

1. Some state unions are choosing to break off from the ANA. Does this further fragment nursing’s collective power in the political arena by diminishing group size, or does it increase the broad-based support of nursing issues?

Ans.: There is no easy answer to support the state unions’ decision to break off from the ANA in regards to fragmenting collective power in the political arena due to diminished group size or increasing the broad-based support of nursing issues. In my opinion, the decision of unions to break off from the ANA obviously came from the point of view that the ANA was/is not effective as far as acquiring effective power and bringing about the changes that are needed to elevate the nursing profession. Perhaps if nurses become effective based on state level organizing, eventually a “Congress of Collective Bargaining” for the nursing profession will develop and use the problem solving and ideas of a body of nurses who represent nursing as it is practiced from state to state.

1. Do you believe that the current nursing shortage will accelerate the rate of unionization in nursing?

Ans.: Whether or not the current nursing shortage will accelerate the rate of unionization in nursing or not depends largely on the strategy of how well management addresses the shortage as well as the retention of nurses. According to Issa in History (2008), “What lead to the ultimate lack of success of the union movement is mainly the fact that business leaders were always managing to find ways to stand in the way of giving their employers what they wanted”. One major way is to import workers from another country who will work for less pay and benefits because

“As incoming immigrants came into the U.S they were in desperate need of jobs. Lucky for most of them they could get jobs in place of the people who wanted unions. This was a great advantage towards business owners because now they could pay laborers at very low costs not having to worry about any unions trying to get descent work days. As for union workers, most of them had to look for work elsewhere and union workers who stayed were forced to work independently and dreadfully in the same conditions as the immigrants” (Issa in History, 2008).

Thus, until there is a worldwide understanding amongst nurses of the common ground that they have as nurses, management will find ways to capitalize off of human need, differences in culture etc. and use this factors to divide workers. Cultural clash between nurses of different cultures is a real life experience for many nurses. If the nursing profession can learn to view nurses as professionals who are part of a group with specific interests and purposes which override differences, unionization will be sporadic.

1. How does a nursing shortage affect a union’s power in negotiating wages, benefits, and working conditions?

Ans.: Due to the unsatisfactory working conditions that are created by the nursing shortage, unions have the capacity to negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions. According to Susser (2009), although there has been a decline in union membership over all in the United States which cover a variety of workers, “… union membership in the category of "Healthcare Practitioner and Technical Occupations" is growing instead. This category includes physicians, dentists, veterinarians and various categories of therapists and technicians. Within this category, registered nurses and other non-physician field have seen the most unionization”. The California Nurses Association, the Massachusetts Nurses Association, the National Nurses Organizing Committee and the United American Nurses merged in December 2009 to become the 150.000 member National Nurses United which is an organization that is affiliated with the AFL-CIO and is the largest nurses union in the country. Much of the work they do revolves around the issues of increased working hours, mandatory overtime and increased patient loads. So, as the nursing shortage continues, so will the unionization of nurses.

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