

**THE
MINNESOTA
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

**A
Notebook**

On it's

HISTORY

TACTICS

and

RELATIONS AND COMPARISON

with the

MINNESOTA EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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The National Education Association: A Special Mission, (NEA, 1987) reported that: "At the 1903 convention in Boston, fiery Margaret Haley, an NEA member and leader of the Chicago Federation of Teachers, led a demonstration to bring attention to the need for improvement of the lot of teacher. This demonstration produced a call for funds to be appropriated by NEA to work to improve teacher salaries, tenure, and pension. [This] was done..."⁴

Even though NEA leadership positions belonged to school administrators, Ms. Haley's active leadership role was instrumental in the development of NEA's Department of Classroom teachers. NEA's first female president was Chicago's Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, elected with Haley's support in 1907.

After withdrawing from the American Federation of Teachers and the Chicago Labor Council in 1917, the Chicago Federation of Teachers formally affiliated with the NEA in 1921. Haley resigned from the AFT in 1918, remaining an active NEA member into the 1920's.

The first Minnesota Federation local, organized in 1918, was the St. Paul Federation of Women Teachers. Composed of women teachers, the Minneapolis local was formed in 1919. Interestingly, both Minneapolis and St. Paul had separate locals for men and women for many years. The current locals have carried the numbers of the women's locals since their merger in the 1950's, possibly because a low number is a coveted sign of prestige among Federation ranks.

It's probable that women formed the first two Federation locals in Minnesota because they had finally "had it" with wildly disparate conditions between predominantly male-secondary and female-elementary teachers. The then-management-oriented NEA likely could provide little support for the concerns and protests of women teachers, especially since the superintendents of both Minneapolis and St. Paul were most likely NEA members. The St. Paul and Minneapolis teachers found a "voice" within area AFL organizations as AFT members.

Working conditions for women teachers were typical of working conditions for all women during that period in our history. Perhaps the men had always been more equitably treated and didn't feel such a strong need to organize, but the fact remains that women teachers started the first Federation locals in the state of Minnesota.

Prior to the chartering of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers, a third local was formed in Duluth. Organized in 1935 for essentially the same reasons that were present in Minneapolis and St. Paul, this local "sputtered along" until it ceased to exist in 1942. In 1944, however, it was reported in Organizing the Teaching Profession that "over 75% of Duluth classroom teachers" were enrolled in that local.⁵ (page 46.)

1945 to 1960. After World War II, labor unrest began to appear on the scene in Minnesota. On November 25, 1946, the St. Paul Federation members went on strike. Nothing of substance was gained for the teachers by the time it ended on December 28, 1946, but it appears to have been the single event that legitimized the Federation as an "activist" organization. At that time, strikes were extra-legal since no law permitting or prohibiting them existed in the state.

There seemed to have been no involvement of the MFT or AFT in the St. Paul conflict, which at that time was "the biggest strike by teachers in the nation's history, and the first by a major local of the AFT...for six

⁴ Butler, Susan Lowell, **National Education Association: A Special Mission**. NEA, Washington, DC, 1987.

⁵ **Organizing The Teaching Profession**, op.cit.

weeks, the St. Paul teachers walked the picket line...and they walked virtually alone. The AFT all but ignored the walkout; The American Teacher [AFT's publication] never mentioned it."⁶

In 1948, Federation members in Gilbert called a strike. In the same year, teachers in Minneapolis went on strike.

The Minneapolis strike started on February 24 with money as the source of conflict, just as it had been in St. Paul. But many, including the Minneapolis superintendent, seemed to agree with Mayor Hubert Humphrey who said, "Minneapolis is powerless to meet the financial requirements of providing decent education for its children." (Time, March 2, 1948, p. 84.)

At the same time, "Critics of the union wondered why the teachers did not wait until March 24 [since] on that date a new city charter [would] be voted which would authorize the education board to borrow adequate funds to keep the schools open." (Newsweek, March 8, 1948, page 80.)

The precise outcome of the 1948 strike is unknown, but it is generally acknowledged that it was necessary and did lead to some economic gains.

Minneapolis teachers struck again in 1951 just after then-Superintendent Rufus Putnam had told the MFT that if they went on strike he would see to it that Minnesota would enact a "no-strike law." The strike thus became an issue in itself.

The 1951 strike is not one recalled with pride by CMFT. Not only does it appear that the gains from this strike were minimal, but the losses to all Minnesota teachers in the form of a repressive anti-strike law passed as a direct result of the strike were long lasting and severe.

The second strike started on January 23, 1951, as a strike by janitors against the school district. The February 13, 1951, Minneapolis Tribune stated that "The strike later was joined by teachers belonging to Local 238 (men teachers) and Local 59 (women teachers) of the American Federation of Teachers. The Unions have claimed about half of the 2200 teachers...Also on strike is Local 56 AFL State, County, and Municipal Workers comprising about 300 clerical employees...Not on strike are non-union teachers (most of whom belong to the Minneapolis Teachers League or the Women's Forum) and about 600 Union maintenance workers."

While there had never been laws to address the issue of strikes by public employees, that changed almost immediately. The February 16, 1951, Minneapolis Tribune announced that a "No-Strike Bill" had been introduced in the legislature.

The Minneapolis Teachers Strike ended with a relative "whimper" on February 14, 1951, the day after Governor Youngdahl ordered the teachers back to work. The February 13, Minneapolis Tribune indicates that no wage increases were granted, but that there was an agreement by the parties to lobby for more state money.

The MFT strike did succeed in accomplishing one other objective: a no-strike law affecting all teachers was passed by the State Legislature. The March 14, 1951, Minneapolis Tribune reported that "During the course of heated debate (in the Senate, whose members later passed the bill 44-22) which lasted more than four hours, there was no question that the recent Minneapolis school strike had prodded the Senate into action."

After the reconciliation of the House and Senate versions of the bill, the final law (MS 179.51-.58 attached, Appendix A) included strong penalties for those teachers violating the provisions of the No-Strike Law.

⁶ **Teachers and Power: The Story of the American Federation of Teachers**, op.cit.

The strike prohibition language remained in force until the 1980 legislative session replaced the 29-year-old law with the current "Right to Strike" law. (MS 179.64, now MS 179A.18)

The legacy of the 1951 Minneapolis teachers strike was not the one that had been desired by the Federation of Teachers.

Not surprisingly, the AFT Executive Council acted in 1951 to reaffirm a 1947 policy detailing the AFT ban on strikes by AFT affiliates. The AFT position was that problems ought to be settled by more professional means, such as legislation.⁷ This "No-Strike" posture of AFT continued until repeal in 1963.

A SHORT COMMENTARY ON STRIKES . . . AND TEACHERS

The concept of "strike" is still a troublesome one to many teachers. As previously noted, for years AFT was opposed to strikes. So was the AFL-CIO.⁸ In the "organizing years" of the 60's and 70's, however, the MFT often contrasted its supposed "militancy" against MEA by pointing proudly at its strikes in Minneapolis, New York, and elsewhere. MFT also touted the supposed militancy of the AFL-CIO. Both claims were false in their implications but became part of our institutionalized mythology that has endured in some places until the present.

Today the record is very clear: teachers in both organizations strike when necessary, and only when necessary. There is no "union label" on strikes.

In the August 1967 Monthly Labor Review⁹ Ronald Glass reviewed teacher strikes from 1940-66 involving "a minimum of 6 employees and lasting at least 1 full day". Glass divided the strikes into six groups: AFL; CIO; AFL-CIO; Independent organization; Professional Association; Unorganized. While not specifically identified, it appears that the first three categories were AFT; and the Professional Association was the NEA.

Glass reports: in the period 1940-66, there were 88 strikes by "Federation locals" as compared with 37 for "Association locals." These strikes involved 54,240 teachers (AFT) and 48,050 (NEA), resulting in

⁷ **Organizing The Teaching Profession**, op.cit., pp. 272-73 (Appendix "B" attached).

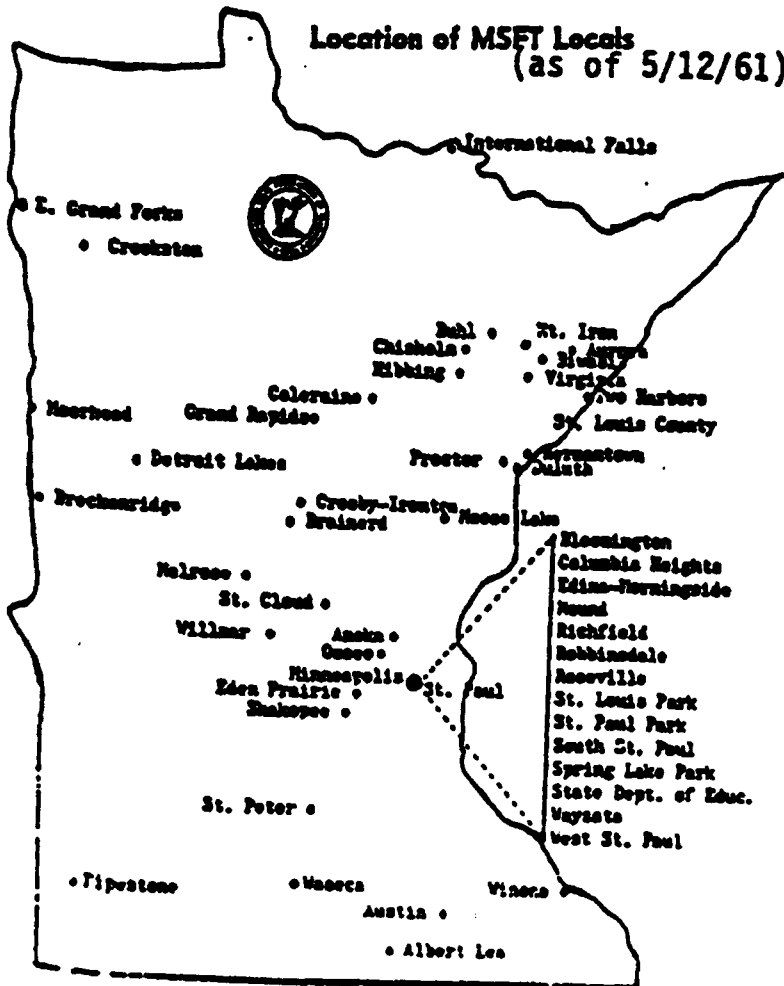
⁸ In the summer 1988 issue of Minnesota History, Robert M. Eleff, in his article "**The 1916 Minnesota Miners Strike Against U.S. Steel**", comments as follows on the position of the AFL in that violent strike and its aftermath: "The unorganized miners soon realized that they needed help in their battle with the steel trust. The Western Federation of Miners, remembering its defeat in 1907 and weakened by an unsuccessful strike in the Michigan copper mines in 1913, was uninterested in organizing the range miners. The Minnesota branch of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was likewise unconcerned. Proud of its craft-oriented basis and record of moderation and co-operation with business interests, the AFL was not about to organize a flock of unskilled immigrants, ("ignorant of our language, laws, our institutions and their own rights," according to the state AFL organ) in a region well known for its Socialist tendencies. State AFL president E. George Hall even went so far as to denounce the strike on a visit to Hibbing on June 17. Abandoned by the mainstream labor movement, the strikers turned to the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who responded immediately by sending its top organizers....It was more than a quarter century after the strike ended, in 1943, the Oliver [mining company] finally signed a labor contract with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, bringing labor unions on the iron range to stay."

⁹ Glass, Ronald. "Work Stoppages and Teachers", **Monthly Labor Review**, August, 1967, as reprinted in **Report Card** for Social Science Teachers, Vol. XVI No. 1, October, 1967.

256,920 [teacher]-days idle for the (AFT) and 85,660 [teacher]-days idle for the (NEA). The Association was no "stranger" to strikes, even before 1970.

In 1954, the MFT was approaching its 18th birthday. In the January, 1979, MFT Action, the state of the 1954 Federation was described: "Since January [of 1953] the number of locals had risen from 20 to 23, and the membership had climbed from 3,196 to 3,247. And the convention - in April of 1953 - had increased the dues from \$.75 to \$4.00."

At this time, the president of the Federation was Columbia Heights teacher Harvey Otterson. Henry Winkels was the part-time Federation Executive Secretary. He was a teacher in St. Paul Park, and was apparently full-time of Executive Secretary from 1954-1958. Winkels put out the first MFT NEWS-LETTER in 1954. It was a 3 1/2 page mimeographed piece. Later, Harvey Otterson became Executive Secretary and Winkels became MFT's first legislative affairs director.



Which were the Federation locals in January, 1954? We have no complete listing. But it is known that there were separate men and women Federation locals in Minneapolis and St. Paul. There was a Duluth local. And there were locals in Columbia Heights, St. Paul Park, St. Louis Park, So. St. Paul, St. Cloud, International Falls, Brainerd and Hibbing. (It's likely that most of the MFT locals which became exclusive representatives in 1971 had active chapters in 1954.) From the beginning and until recently, the Edina, Columbia Heights and Minneapolis locals seem to have provided many of the major "power actors" in MFT politics. Since there were 3,247 members

The "Meet and Confer" Law was by no means perfect - legislation seldom is. Laws like Meet and Confer are attempts to balance often diametrically opposed interests.

The Federation was righteously indignant about the Law. "Collective Begging and the Law" was the title of a long article in the Fall 1967 Minnesota Teacher.²² The article, by Ed Rapp, made certain that all real and imagined defects of the Law were exposed, and tried to make the MEA the scapegoat for its passage.

An example of the Federation's approach to the new "Meet and Confer" Law was in Minneapolis. In 1967, the City of Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (CMFT) held a membership majority over the City of Minneapolis Education Association (CMEA).

Still, during the first contract negotiations in 1968 under "Meet and Confer", even though it could have had a majority of members on the teacher team, the Federation refused to participate in the process. **Without Federation participation** the CMEA in October, 1968, became the first Minnesota teacher local to have a written contract with its employer. This first contract was also the first Minnesota teacher contract to include a grievance procedure ending in binding arbitration, and also included a provision for limiting of class size.

Elsewhere, the Federation did its best to sabotage the Law. In St. Paul Park-Newport (now So. Washington County) some imaginative leaders of the minority MFT created two additional teacher organizations of which about 80% became members. In effect, the Federation members, originally about 100 in number, "increased" themselves to over 260 - a tongue-in-cheek "clear majority".²³ It was an unsuccessful attempt to make an absurdity out of the Law's proportional representation provision. School Boards, likewise, were mischievous and frequently attempted to avoid the "Meet and Confer" requirements.

By the next round, in 1968, (negotiations occurred annually in those years) the Federation began to use the Law to its organizational advantage in Minneapolis, and elsewhere. If it was in the majority, it tended to totally control the process. If it was in the minority, as it almost always was, its members could sit on the Teacher's Council, participate in all deliberations, **and later blame the majority EA for the results which, then as now, were never ideal.** It was the beginning of the war for representation between MFT and MEA in Minnesota.

ON THE ROAD TO STRIKE IN MINNEAPOLIS - 1969-70: The next **major** event which gave the MFT unexpected credibility was the Minneapolis teachers strike of 1970. At the time of the strike, the CMFT and the CMEA were still essentially the same size in membership. However the CMFT possessed a small majority entitling it to 3-2 representation on the Teachers Council.

Negotiations broke down in mid-April, 1970. After a series of maneuvers, the Federation excluded the MEA from bargaining and convinced its members to call for an illegal strike (a common AFT tactic in the 1960's). The strike lasted from April 9-28. It is arguable, given the Federation organizing strategy of the time, that the Minneapolis strike was "designer made" by the AFT to help ensure later Union control of Minneapolis teachers. After all, the strategy had worked before in other places.

In fact, in the spring of 1969, one of AFT's chief architects of strikes, Joe Cascella, had been "stirring the pot" in Minneapolis. As reported in the MEA Urban-Suburban President's Newsletter Vol 5 No 9 May, 1969, "Minneapolis teachers, given an intolerable choice Sunday night, were forced to accept a poor settlement rather than follow further ill-conceived and ill-timed strategy.

²² **Minnesota Teacher**, Fall, 1967.

²³ **Minnesota Education News**, MEA, November, 1967.

The only vote Joe Cascella of the AFT staff would allow was:

1. Accept the package as presented and not strike.
2. Reject the package as presented and strike Monday morning, May 26th.

The vote was 1450 to accept and 1025 to strike. This vote did not indicate general acceptance of the package by Minneapolis teachers. It indicated dissatisfaction with the only choice forced on them.

The frustration of Minneapolis teachers was shown by union members who led the fight against Cascella's tactics. Ted Lange of Minneapolis Roosevelt High, and chairman of the Minneapolis Teachers Council until Cascella took over negotiations, fought against the strike timing. Fred Pearson, editor of the union newsletter, also spoke against current tactics, and a rank-and-file union member went so far as to question why "this outsider" was asked in.

The Minneapolis Teachers Council, controlled 3-2 by the union, voted unanimously to reject the package. In front of the nearly 3000 teachers, Cascella agreed with Bob Black, CMEA Executive Director, that "negotiations have been mishandled since November. This is a poor package...."

Given the "forced choice" between two bad options, Minneapolis teachers chose to settle in 1969.

The 1970 MINNEAPOLIS STRIKE: An article in the Winter 1971 Minnesota Teacher "I Care Enough: The 1970 Minneapolis Teachers Strike" hints at the MFT's strategy in Minneapolis in 1970. On January 19, 1970, "one of the Minneapolis papers" headlined: "Teacher Pay Talks Calm." In the article, according to the author of "I Care Enough...", the MEA representative on the scene had a positive view of negotiations prospects but "Edward Bolstad, executive director of the MFT, ...more accurately [hinted] at the Minneapolis teachers strike which was to ensue some eleven weeks later, "This could be a slowdown year. Talking will be easier but the settlements will be more difficult."²⁴ Ken Miesen, one of AFT's "road warriors", was directly involved in events leading to the strike.

During the illegal strike, the CMEA went to court on matters relating to denial of its members rights and won its case on the merits.²⁵ The strike was ultimately settled and, while there were virtually no gains realized from the strike itself (a la St. Paul in 1946), the Federation gained an immense amount of undeserved credibility with the "militant" teachers in Minnesota.

(One cannot overstate the fact that one of the aftermaths of the turbulent 60's was the legitimization of protest. Law-breaking at the time of the 1970 strike was viewed by many teachers, and others, as a virtue and not a "sin." On the other hand, for many teachers the 1970 strike was very disruptive and confusing. A Minneapolis teacher who was an unwilling participant in the 1970 strike, in June, 1988, read all of the articles about the strike which are here cited and commented as follows: **"Thank you for sharing the Minneapolis Strike materials with me - it was strange to find something so real a part of history, and strange also to still find, after reading, that I had had no part of any decisions - it was a most frustrating time for me as a non-striker and MEA member - our principal closed [my school] after the second day. We lost so much of the ground gained after the [race] riots [in 1967]. The kids were just getting back to trusting and sharing and learning - there! I'm d--n mad all over again").**

²⁴ Minnesota Teacher, Minnesota Federation of Teachers, Winter 1971

²⁵ 1970 Minneapolis Strike Chronology, assembled after the 1970 Minneapolis Strike by MEA and CMEA Crisis staff members.

1968-1970 IN MINNEAPOLIS: A VIEW FROM AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF CMEA

During the formative years of bargaining under Meet and Confer, Minneapolis teacher and CMEA member Don Luebeck was a very active participant in the bargaining process in Minneapolis. He wrote with his recollections in April, 1988:

"Federation members of the CMFT were upset with the CMFT leadership for not applying for membership on the Teacher's Council (TC) for the 1967-8 school year. The leadership did apply for 1968-69 and won three seats versus two seats for the CMEA. During this year, [my CMEA colleague] and myself as the CMEA reps to the TC, tried in vain to pass on our negotiations knowledge to the CMFT and especially to [the] CMFT chair of the TC.

It was obvious to us as CMEA reps that the CMFT had but one goal in mind: Strike!! After negotiations stalled [in 1969] the AFT sent Joe Cascella to assist the CMFT. We were vindicated, as Joe proceeded to take the CMFT to task for messing up most details of the negotiating process. He repeated almost verbatim all that we had said all year. We had many, many long talks with Joe Cascella. We actually admired him for his honesty and blunt manner. He stated directly that he was in Minneapolis to promote a strike and to get a contract settlement.

His plan was to have informational picketing in the morning at each work location beginning on a Monday. On Thursday the word would go out to all picket captains that no one was to enter the buildings come 8:00 a.m. and we would have a strike without a single vote being taken.

The CMEA with the assistance of CMFT members in several buildings quickly put a halt to these plans. Joe's next idea was to conduct a strike vote on a Monday morning. He stated that he would be sure to keep the meeting going beyond 8:00 a.m. and hence once again a strike would be on.

That idea didn't fly any better and the CMFT and Joe moved the meeting to a Sunday night at the old Pick-Nicollet hotel. The CMEA was extremely successful in getting a "no" vote. The choices were: Accept the Package and not strike or Reject the package and strike. The vote was 1025 to strike and 1450 not to strike.

The next year [1969-70] saw a much better organized CMFT. They once again controlled the TC by a 3-2 vote. We once again represented the CMEA.

During the 1968-69 school year we had been very successful in influencing many decisions of the TC. In fact the MFT chair agreed with CMEA on many issues before the 1969 strike vote. But he was a loyal CMFT member and resigned from the TC instead of voting with the CMEA which he would have liked to have done. Replacing him was a teacher from my work location who had no experience in negotiations.

In 1969-70 the CMEA had little influence. It was once again clear that CMFT was about the business of having a strike. All positions taken at the negotiations table pointed to a strike. The implementation of the strike is an interesting piece of history known to only a few people.

Throughout the 1969-70 year the CMFT had tried without success to convince us to support a strike as members of the Teachers Council. Then the TC would call a strike. **Since we [CMEA members of the Teachers Council] would not support the move to strike, the CMFT conducted a strike vote only amongst its members, and got a positive vote.**

The CMEA also conducted a strike vote. On the first vote we decided not to take a middle of the road approach (stay out of the buildings but not go on strike.) On a second vote we voted not to go on strike. We then reverted back to the first proposal and implemented our "Truth Squads". I opposed this position as I felt we should have supported their strike (my first position), or not support their strike and go in the

buildings based upon the fact that this was an illegal strike and that teachers had nothing to gain but would lose.

On Wednesday afternoon, April 8, 1970, the TC met at the Capp Towers (now Holiday Inn Central.) At this meeting, the CMFT president, and CMFT executive secretary, informed us that they had a tentative settlement. The two secondary CMFT members voted to accept [this settlement], with CMEA members abstaining since the strike scheduled to begin the next day was not a TC strike. As CMFT's Executive Secretary was about to call the Superintendent the CMFT elementary member of the TC entered the room. When she found out the details of the proposed settlement she was furious. The two secondary members changed their vote and by a 3-0 vote, with we again abstaining, the proposal was rejected and the strike was on.

The TC never formally approved the final settlement once the CMFT had concluded contract talks. We were denied access to their meetings. Although the court ruled in our favor [about access to the negotiations] it was a moot point. The CMFT had gone on strike, not the Teachers Council and not the CMEA. It was up to the CMFT to get their members back to work.

The gain from the 1970 CMFT strike was only one: three thirty minute periods of elementary prep time during the first year of the contract.

We later learned that the district had planned to hire the specialists even before there were any talks of strikes, and the CMFT could have most likely secured this prep time without a strike.

It is ironic that the same no-strike law that the CMFT was responsible for was the law that bit them in 1970. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled to uphold the no-strike law and teachers of Minneapolis who were judged to be on strike lost money. Eventually by making up some time and by legislative action they regained about 90% of salary lost."

FINALIZING NEGOTIATIONS LAW IN MINNESOTA: In 1971, the state legislature passed the first edition of the Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA) which, for the first time, mandated negotiations and called for binding arbitration of grievances and called for an "exclusive representative". PELRA was an MEA-initiated bill but the Federation attempted (and still attempts) to take credit for achieving PELRA. No longer was there to be a Teacher's Council with proportional representation. It was to be "winner take all."

By 1971, 20 years had passed since the teacher No-Strike Law had been passed compliments of MFT. This fact was ignored by MFT. In the MFT leader's mind the 1967 Meet and Confer Law was MEA's fault and the 1971 teacher bargaining law was MFT's success and the 1951 No-Strike Law was "forgotten". What really happened? Clues are abundantly available.

For example, the archives yield an article in the Winter, 1968, Minnesota Teacher entitled **The 1967 Minnesota Teachers Negotiations Law**. Co-authored by renowned "teacher advocate" Cy Smythe, (the Board negotiator during the bitter Sauk Rapids Strike of 1984,) and Donald Davis, it indicted Meet and Confer as "an unfortunate statute for the public, the school board, and the teachers."²⁶ MEA, of course, was prominently mentioned as supporting Meet and Confer. But the authors did call Meet and Confer a "Teachers Negotiations Law." (emphasis supplied)

²⁶ Minnesota Teacher, Minnesota Federation of Teachers, Winter, 1968