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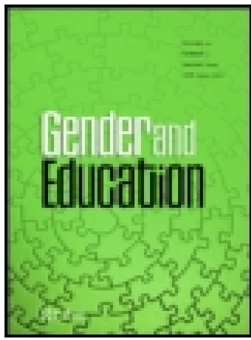

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When solidarity doesn't quite strike: the 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin teachers' strike and the rise of neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT
As public-sector unions such as teachers' unions used the boon of post-war liberalism to form their political power, they imported many of liberalism's key contradictions: its formation of racial contracts, its misappraisal of affective labour, and its opportunistic collective action logics. This article suggests cracks within liberalism weakened the political power of teachers' unions, disempowering a feminised workforce. Using a historical case study of teachers' strike in rural Wisconsin in 1974, this article shows how the tenuous solidarity afforded by liberal accords made teachers' unions more vulnerable to future neoliberal offensives on public education and its workers. The aftermath of the strike generated an opportunistic labour movement in which workers pursued their interests through legal provisions rather than by developing teachers' broader community and labour solidarities, subverting feminist possibilities of teachers' unions. This history suggests *how* teachers defend their rights as workers amidst a rising tide of neoliberalism matters.

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Introduction

Critical scholars increasingly expose the effects of 'neoliberalism' on public education, documenting how such policy regimes divest from public institutions such as schools, relax state regulations, weaken workers' rights and open new educational arenas for private ventures (e.g. Burch 2006; Ball 2007; Scott 2009; Anderson and Donchik 2014). A body of literature describes the deleterious impacts of these programmes, such as their exacerbation of social inequalities and loss of democratic processes (e.g. Bartlett et al. 2002; Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon 2011; Lipman 2011). Increasingly, teachers' unions are hailed as leaders of resistance to these policies, and for good reason (Compton and Weiner 2008; Hagopian and Green 2012; Weiner 2012): mobilised teachers' unions have a powerful voice to speak against market-based education reforms, highlight racial and economic disparities, and revalorise teaching work, depreciated by its feminisation (Weiner 1996; Rousmaniere 2005; Gutstein and Lipman 2013; Uetricht 2014). Yet, despite notable recent examples, teachers' unions typically do not mobilise for gender, racial or economic justice within and beyond schools, instead tending to short-term, economistic interests of individual members. This economism has spurred political whiplash against teachers'

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unions, who are critiqued for acting against the interests of students and communities (e.g. Lieberman 2000; Moe 2011). Yet critics and defenders alike treat teachers' unions as monolithic and predetermined characters, rather than polyvalent creations of a contingent history. Furthermore, this perspective assumes political economic changes affecting teachers' unions originate entirely outside of schools, obscuring the relative autonomy of schools and teachers.

This article aims to add historical nuance to this conversation by exploring the residual pathways from which neoliberal policies – specifically the weakening of workers' rights – have emerged. Through a historical case study, the article suggests that how teachers' unions configured their political power during a period of rising militancy in the mid-1970s made them subsequently more vulnerable in the burgeoning resentment towards the public sector and workers' rights of the late 1970s. The diminished political power of public-sector unions is a decidedly gendered issue: most public-sector employees are women, their work sustains public institutions and thus constitutes public care labour. Weakened labour rights for public-sector worker politically disempowers women and care labour. Diminishing teachers' unions' rights evident today, I aim to suggest, is best understood not simply as the rise of neoliberalism, but the failures of liberalism, the political and economic programme of individual rights that hailed in the United States between 1940 and 1970 (Mills 1997; Rodger 2011; Cowie 2016). As public-sector unions, including teachers' unions, used the boon of post-war liberalism to form their political power, they imported its key contradictions: its formation of racial contracts, its misappraisal of affective labour and its opportunistic collective action logics. This article shows how cracks within liberalism weakened the political power of teachers' unions, disempowering a feminised workforce.

To do so, this article takes a historical detour through a small town in rural Wisconsin in 1974, during a violent teachers' strike in which all 88 striking teachers were fired. The town of Hortonville's violent response to the striking teachers triggered calls for a statewide sympathy strike, and ultimately sparked successful arbitration legislation in Wisconsin for public-sector workers. Therefore, the Hortonville strike is often interpreted as something of a victory for labour because of its role in yielding arbitration legislation (Saltzman 1986; Mertz 2015). However, the following analysis suggests the Hortonville teachers strike and its aftermath is better understood as the advent of labour's weakening, an emblematic fulcrum between public-sector union's vigorous assent in the early 1970s and its swift decline in the late 1970s (McCartin 2008a). Drawing from oral histories of teachers, union activists, townspeople and school board members, collected in 1974 by a Wisconsin Historical Society field researcher, as well as archives from the Wisconsin Education Association Council archive collection, housed in the Wisconsin Historical society and the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA), I show how the state teachers' unions assumed a pragmatic form of action post-Hortonville, which ultimately undermined teachers' solidarity and contributed to the advance of market liberalism. After a brief note on the strike's significance for the present, this article assumes the following trajectory. First, I will provide a narrative of the 1974 Hortonville teachers' strike and the actions leading up to it, and the significance of the strike and its blowback for a feminised workforce. Then, I will review the decision of the statewide teachers' union federation decision not to strike, and the racial contract embedded and urban–rural divide embedded within that decisions. Finally, I will assess the shifting collective action logics resultant from

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Hortonville, turning to sociologists Offe and Wiesenthal's (1980) to explore the theoretical and practical implications of this strategy shift.

I suggest that the strategy shift post-1974 Hortonville teachers' strike had fundamentally gendered effects, depreciating not only a workforce that was predominantly female but also the rights of care workers and affective labour. One of the chief impacts of the Hortonville teachers' strike was a decisive turn against public-sector unions' rights to strike, a resulting in a long-term weakness of US labour power, a position taken up by both labour and its opponents (e.g. Burns 2014). In the early 1970s, public-sector workers were predominantly female and workers of colour (Bell 1985; McCartin 2006). Therefore, the shift away from striking and other legal rights represented a fundamental loss of power for a significant number of female workers. What's more, the popular blowback teachers received from striking revealed a basal antipathy towards the rights and remuneration of affective labourers (Shelton 2013). Because a central element of teachers' work is to care for dependent (students), many viewed their pursuit of independent rights as inapt, even offensive. This negative reaction revealed deep-seeded fault lines in the economy's growing reliance on immaterial labour – labour that provides service, information and communication (Hardt 1999). As the Hortonville strike foreshadowed, the economic misrecognition of immaterial labour – despite the economy's increasing reliance on such labour – would come characterise the political economy of neoliberalism, creating gendered inequalities in educational work and beyond (McRobbie 2010; Kostogriz 2012). Therefore, the Hortonville strike reveals not only the growing conservatism outside of teachers' unions, but also the problematic organisation within teachers' unions that failed to offer a strong alternative to external threatens. The weakening of teachers' unions characteristic of neoliberal programmes not only disempowers a predominantly female workforce, also it devalues affective labour.

Ultimately, I wish to communicate that in order to understand the potential of teachers' unions to act as transformative agents of education justice and effectively lead resistance against the neoliberal order, we must understand the – perhaps unstable – forms of collective action with which teachers unions built their power. If teachers' unions are to be a means of defence against the neoliberal devaluing of public education, they must be prepared to chart new political ground to redefine solidarity and its requirements.

Why does the 1974 Hortonville strike matter for today?

Mounting conservative pressures from the changing political economy put teachers' unions like those in Hortonville, Wisconsin in a defensive position in the 1970s as the economy collapsed, and conservative ideology took root, transforming citizens from public beneficiaries to private taxpayers (Apple and Oliver 1996; Apple 2006; Cowie 2010). Between 1940 and 1970, Wisconsin led the nation's labour movement. In 1959, after nearly a decade of organising and lobbying for legal protection, Wisconsin's council of municipal employees won the right to bargain collectively with their employers, becoming the first state in the country to provide public-sector collective bargaining rights. Over the next two decades, Wisconsin's public-sector employees continued to push for legal expansion of their union rights, establishing key legal victories of compulsory bargaining and setting pace for the rest of the nation. Across the nation, teachers' unions witnessed a growth in power and militancy in the early 1970s. Yet by the late

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1970s, growing rural conservatism shifted popular support away from public institutions and unionised workers (Slater 2004; Cowie 2010; Scribner 2013).

My intention in this essay is not to condemn teachers' actions. Indeed, I view the teachers' opportunistic tactics post-Hortonville as rational given the political balance of public opinion at that time, which generally favoured public-sector unions in the 1960s and 1970s. The legal victory embodied in interest arbitration was made possible by a sympathetic state legislature, a progressive governor and energised labour lobbyists. However, when this leadership and these political forces were no longer in power, an important question surfaced: was labour strong enough to hold itself up on its own? This question is especially pertinent today, given the radically different political forces in power today. In the past five years, Wisconsin has heralded a nation-wide evisceration of public-sector employees' rights, with historic anti-labour legislation passing in 2011 in Wisconsin, again in 2015 when Wisconsin became the nation's 25th 'right-to-work' state, and the pending current Supreme Court decision that would nationally dismantle public-sector unions (Antonucci 2015). In addition to highlighting both the rational and unstable tendencies of political opportunism, the Hortonville case offers important resources for labour's next horizons. The nation-wide changes to public-sector union rights which erupted in 2011 in Wisconsin begs the question, on what basis did these rights form? What cracks may have been present in the initial formation of these rights that contributed to their subsequent political vulnerability?

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1974: Hortonville, Wisconsin

Hortonville, Wisconsin is a small rural town located near the Fox River Valley. In the mid-1970s, the town mostly comprised of small-scale farmers and small industrial owners of a local paper mill, who had maintained long-time influence over the school system. The school board was controlled by the small-town power elite, described by a local organiser as 'a country-club circle [with] a whole mystique wrapped up around them … and one-hundred years of traditional subservience to that power.'[1] Yet, in the 1970s, as the nearby city of Appleton's economy shifted to more white-collar employment, Hortonville experienced suburbanisation pressures, particularly as the population grew in the adjacent town of Greenville. This put increasing pressure on the Hortonville's school district, which covered a large geographic area that was fifteen miles wide. The town of 1500 people now served 1900 students in its schools (Hensel 1974). Between 1970 and 1973, a referendum to build new schools to deal with overcrowding was proposed three different times. Each time, the referendum was voted down, in high-turn out votes; the majority of local voters were rural, conservative and resistant to increases in property-taxes, despite a documented need for expanded facilities (Lee 1973).

The lack of public investment in education bore heavily on Hortonville's teachers. Rising growth in student population and lack of sufficient space and resources made the work of teaching more difficult. For one thing, overcrowding meant that classrooms took on multiple purposes; teachers and students crisscrossed through buildings, holding art classes in the gym and cramming high-school courses in the elementary school classrooms. Second, overcrowding constrained the student-centered pedagogy implemented by Hortonville teachers, such as individually guided education. This alternative teaching model involved a coordinated system of planned, individualised instruction in which students progressed at their own rate through personalised curricular materials, with one-on-one support from

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teacher (Holzman 1972). This programme had become an important component of the Hortonville school district. It received positive attention and enthusiasm from parents, educators and statewide administrators and was used as a model for other districts in the state (*Appleton Post-Crescent* 1973). Without public money to expand the facilities, administrators proposed lengthening the school day by two hours in order to have multiple shifts of instruction (Scribner 2013, 114). The failed referendum also eliminated the individually guided instruction programmes (Lee 1975).[2]

In addition to increasing work pressures and a loss of professional autonomy, teachers started the 1973–1974 school year without a contract, and had not had a pay raise in three years, putting their wages $1000 lower than those of teachers working in nearby Appleton (Sherman 1974). In the fall of 1973, the Hortonville Education Association (HEA), the local teachers' union affiliated with the National Education Association (NEA), began bargaining for higher wages, hoping to get a contract in place for the reminder of the year. Their initial bargaining proposal asked for a salary raise from $7900 to $8100 for teachers with a bachelor's degree. For the HEA, not only was this raise fairly modest on its own terms, but it was also well within the school's allocated budget for teachers' salaries, which reported a $100,000+ surplus in 1973–1974 ("Hortonville Fact Sheet" 1974). The school board did not agree to the union's offer, but upon the union's request it agreed to a non-binding fact-finding procedure in December of 1973, in which a neutral third-party mediator would review the case and recommend a solution.

Despite their best attempts to improve their working conditions, teachers ended the fall semester of 1973 sourly. The fact-finding mediator did not support a raise for teachers, and instead offered a recommendation nearly identical to the board's own proposal. The union refused to accept the offer and returned to negotiation once more. Meanwhile, the town of Hortonville voted for the third time not to allocate funds for school expansion, making it obvious that teachers would have even fewer resources and face more job pressures in the coming months. When the new semester started after winter break, patience among the teachers was wearing thin. Though they continued to pursue bargaining, teachers unanimously authorised a strike vote in January ("Hortonville Education Association Strike Timeline" 1974).

More than their pay increase, teachers were most concerned about securing a contract with specific language protecting minimum standards of working conditions and an agreed-upon definition of their workday. The HEA asked for the present working conditions to be treated as minimum standards, which the board rejected, claiming it wanted the flexibility to assign teachers to duties and tasks as it needed. Furthermore, the board wanted to change the school day from 8 a.m.–4 p.m. to 7 a.m.–5 p.m., in order to accommodate extra shifts. The union was willing to agree to a longer day, as long as teachers would be able to have eight-hour shifts during the day rather than split shifts, and they asked that the understanding could be renegotiated the next year. The board did not agree. Desperate to get a contract in place, the union dropped all other bargaining issues – such as pay for substitute duty during prep time, release time, dental insurance and car insurance for transporting students (Sherman 1974). The board still did not agree.

The union grew increasingly frustrated with the board's paltry attempts at bargaining, which were interpreted by union members as a refusal to engage in the bargaining process, or as a refusal to offer any concessions. As Mike Wisnoski, the president of

HEA, said, 'It was the board's adamant refusal to sit down and negotiate. They'd just stall and stall and frustrate everything. They don't know what negotiations are. They'd just say take it as it is. They counter-proposed us down to nothing' (Sherman 1974). By February, the HEA had offered to split the difference once again between the board's last non-offer, and the union's last concessions.

Throughout the negotiations, Hortonville teachers conducted a slow build of actions – they stopped their extracurricular commitments, such as advising and coaching, and instead spent their after-school hours informally picketing the high school and handing out leaflets to update the community about the stalled negotiations. In mid-February, the board promised a counter-offer by 15 March, and the teachers stopped picketing in anticipation of a settlement (Barrington 1979). However, when the deadline came and went, teachers decided they had reached their limit. The HEA went on strike on 18 March 1974. As one teacher said,

> If I were asked six months ago, or before the Hortonville situation, I would have said, no I wouldn't go on strike … But I think at this point, I would answer that if situations become such that no bargaining can go on, and that none of my needs will be met and that the children will suffer because of these things, the other alternative is that I would go on strike.[3]

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The strike

Over the next two weeks, schools remained closed in Hortonville while the board and the HEA engaged in unsuccessful negotiations. After a week, parents joined the striking teachers on the picket line and opened an alternative school for children ("1974 Hortonville Strike" 1974). Even when the union attempted to renegotiate to the board's last offer, the board now refused to accept its own offer. This uncompromising action led many teachers to believe the board was engaging in intentional union-busting rather than good-faith negotiations. Indeed, instead of re-opening the contract negotiations, the board offered to review each teacher's case individually. The union refused to participate, declaring its members would have all of their cases reviewed together or none at all (*The Racine Journal Times* 1974c). The board chose to review none of the teachers' cases, and fired all 88 of the striking teachers on 2 April 1974.

This bold manoeuver hit a nerve with teachers and other public-sector workers around the state. Though state law prohibited public-sector employees from striking, a number of teacher unions around the state and nation engaged in increase job actions and strikes between 1971 and 1974 (McCartin 2008b). Most of these strikes were settled within two weeks, often in accordance with the unions' demands. Though in some places workers were threatened with being fired, as in Wild Rose, Wisconsin, usually the school board did not follow through. Occasionally, teachers' unionists were issued fines for striking (Holter 1999). Rarely were teachers actually fired for conducting an illegal strike. However, in Hortonville, the board's actions – both its unwillingness to bargain in good faith and its decision to fire the teachers – shifted the debate away from the substantive issues at stake, such as the pay and protections bestowed to teachers, to a broader question about teachers' right to strike.

Within a week of firing the striking teachers, the board hired replacement teachers and re-opened Hortonville's schools (Barrington 1979). The board's decision to fire the striking teachers and to hire replacements escalated the struggles between the teachers and the

board and galvanised all sides. The teachers hired to replace the striking teachers became a focal point for HEA's struggle. Many of the scab teachers were students from nearby colleges and universities without teaching credentials or certifications. The fact that the Board was willing to hire illegal teachers provoked the ire of HEA, prompting a lawsuit against the board, and triggering a series of resolutions and campaigns pressuring university education programmes to educate their students about the legality of teaching without certification as well as the ethics of strike-breaking ("WEAC Staff Updates" 1974).

The split between strike-supporters and strike-opponents literally divided the town. At one end of the city block that constituted downtown Hortonville, strike-opponents gathered at a local bar, McHugh's Tap, where they formed a small gang, self-dubbed the Vigilante Association. Mostly conservative farmers, the Vigilantes painted their gang name on their pick-up trucks and drove throughout town bantering the striking teachers. Down the block was the striking teachers' headquarters. The town's bakery, tavern, electrical shop and sandwich shop lay in between. Caught in the middle of the struggle, these small business owners wrung their hands. 'It's hell on earth,' said Glen Lathrop, the owner of the town's electrical shop. And at Glenn's Restaurant, just a few doors from the Vigilante Association's stakeout, the dining room buzzed with debates about the controversy. School board supporters ate their sandwiches huddled around the lunch counter. Striking teachers and their supporters filed into booths on the other side of the room (Hensel 1974).

Discourse was no more civil or deliberative on the picket lines. While the school board continued to deny the striking teachers' calls to renegotiate, they also issued calls for students not to talk to their striking teachers on the picket line (Hensel 1974). Furthermore, the newly formed Vigilante Association took it upon itself to reprimand the striking teachers and protect the replacement teachers on behalf of the broader community. A few days after replacement teachers entered the school, the Vigilantes issued a call to action to area farmers. Early the next morning, retired farmers came into town armed with canes, broomsticks, and even firearms. Initially, the vigilantes patrolled only the downtown, but as the crowds of picketers around the high school continued to grow, they expanded their targets to those picketing the school.

In turn, the picketers expanded their targets from the high school to area businesses connected to school board members. Teachers received threats and in several cases picketers were struck by moving vehicles. The president of the statewide teachers union, Laurie Wynn, an African-American woman from Milwaukee, became a special target. In addition to hurling racial slurs at her, Vigilantes struck her with a car and dragged her behind the vehicle for nearly an entire city block. Rocks hurtled through the windows of the striking teachers' headquarters. Vigilantes accused teachers of hanging two dogs. Derogatory slogans covered houses in town. The Outagamie County Sherriff called in supporting deputy officers from surrounding counties in an attempt to maintain public safety, costing taxpayers $100,000. In one day, police arrested 34 people (Barrington 1979). Local newspapers announced they would no longer print letters to the editor about the strike.

If the townspeople and school board was not on the side of the striking teachers, the academic calendar was. Spring break fell only a few weeks away from the teachers' firing, making it easier for sympathetic teachers in other parts of the state to join the strike. Roughly 500 teachers vacationed in Hortonville that spring, using their days off to picket alongside the fired teachers, particularly targeting replacement teachers; cries of

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'scab' and 'strikebreakers' filled the air. Protestors from Madison passed around song sheets with the lyrics to 'Solidarity Forever,' 'We Shall Not Be Moved,' and a 1974 original, 'Hortonville Has a Bad Case of Scabs' ("Hortonville Picket Line Song-Sheet" 1974). Yet many in Hortonville, a conservative town unfamiliar with unions and labour struggles, reacted strongly to the influx of strike-supporters, decreeing strike-supporters as 'consciousness thugs,' and meddling outsiders. As one Vigilante declared,

> We started to get involved when all these outsiders started to come in, and started raising all this chaos. We decided we had to do something in Hortonville to protect the merchants. People in Hortonville weren't even coming downtown to buy groceries. It was like a ghost town down here during the strike.[4]

Notably, teachers were the only unionised workers in town (Rafferty 1974).

Despite the chaos and unrest, solidarity continued to grow for the striking teachers across the state. The NEA organised an 'Adopt-A-Teacher' programme to fundraise for the striking teachers, and a 'Save the Children' fund was organised by Wisconsin teachers' union locals to send supplies to the alternative school ("National Hortonville-Timberlane Adopt-A-Teacher Program" 1974). Hortonville parents sent their testimonies of support for the striking teachers and the individual-guided education programme to local papers; a group of parents filed a motion in the HEA's lawsuit against the board, claiming their children did not receive the same quality of instruction from the replacement teachers ("Hortonville – Summary of Litigation" 1974). One parent poignantly summarised the tension between teachers, parents and a more rural, conservative community in an unpublished letter to the editor. She wrote:

> Due to the fact that we live in a rural community that cares little about education, we are in the minority and our children will suffer. We were also the minority who served anytime with all school activities, including P.T.O., room mothers, open house, school bond referendums, field trips, disciplinary committees, etc. We were the minority that cared! Now, the majority who never bothered to attend any of these school functions are the ones backing the board, manning the school halls so that the interested parents cannot enter the locked and guarded public school building. It's sad, because they will never know what we've lost, simply because they never really knew what we had! This same majority helped considerably in defeating the three school bond referendums, simply because they did not care about education. (Milliren 1974)

As this parent noted, a key issue that came to light in Hortonville was the lack of contact between the townspeople and the teachers, much less public employees or unionised public employees. Ed Gollnick, WEAC Human Relations Direct also noted many in the community had very little awareness of what occurred inside the classroom, much less the details about teachers' work. As he stated, 'One of the problems teachers face is that … the communications that come out about schools are put out by the school board and the administration … because the teachers are teaching.'[5] As a result, Gollnick noted, much of the caring work done by teachers on the behalf of the children of the community was invisible to many outside of the communities. This misunderstanding, Gollnick surmised, fuelled some of the antagonism in Hortonville. And indeed, many community members found the strike 'rude, impolite and abusive.'[6]

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Teachers around the state showed their solidarity with the striking teachers, joining rallies and pickets over their spring break and during weekends. The act of participating in the protests significantly affected their outlook on the strike, transforming many teachers who were previously adverse to 'militant' actions taken by teachers, such as striking. One teacher reflected on her experience in Hortonville picket lines. She said,

> I think it's hard to explain [the impacts of being on the picket lines in Hortonville] because like you said, it affects you personally. Because once you've been through something like that – and we didn't even see the worst of it – you know, you don't forget it. And it's hard to impart that kind of feeling.[7]

Solidarity for the striking Hortonville teachers grew beyond just teachers and local parents. Other labour unions around the state joined the picket lines, and leadership in these unions declared their support. For example, Ray Majerus, the state president of the United Autoworkers, gave a speech at an April rally and Ed Durkin, the president of the state's fire-fighters union, was arrested in a protest ("It Happened in Hortonville" 1974). The Wisconsin Democratic Party supported the striking teachers, as did a women's political caucus (*Appleton Post-Crescent* 1974). The Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the AFL-CIO also showed their support for protests. On 18 April 1974 when a judge ordered an injunction not on the teachers' strike activity, but on their picketing, Ed Muelver, president of the Federation State, County and Municipal Employees, urged widespread demonstrations, and called for a labour day teach-in for Hortonvillers. 'In lieu of a settlement,' he said 'I am requesting a labor-day in Hortonville to teach the town that they can't shove teachers around' (*The Racine Journal Times* 1974a).

Muelver's comment reflected more than just a quip – it suggested bigger questions about labour's strategy going forward. The growing energy on the picket lines at Hortonville – both among strike-supporters and opposition – posed strategic calculations about the statewide teachers' union, the Wisconsin Educational Association Council (WEAC), next moves. In order to legitimise the teachers' union's rights and defeat the school board, would WEAC elevate the strike tactics, calling for greater militancy, wider-solidarity and pedagogic strategies associated with direct action? Or would it channel its fight towards legal strategies – such as seeking relief from the injunction against the teachers' picketing, suing the board for hiring replacement teachers without appropriate teaching credentials or legalising strikes – to defend the affective requirements of education and teachers' rights?

Militant care workers: a liberal contradiction

By striking, the Hortonville teachers made public the need for increased resources for education work. The strike constitutes what Fraser calls 'politicising run-away needs,' in which social needs unmet by the existing political conditions get brought into public discourse (Fraser 1989, 300; Fraser and Honneth 2003). The striking Hortonville teachers brought their unmet need for more pay and protection into public discourse. In addition, the striking teachers aimed to redress the undervaluation of their skills and jobs coded as feminine and care labour. Even when teachers dropped all demands for their own pay increases and simply requested basic protections of their working condition, the Board still refused to negotiate. Nonetheless, the teachers understood that their collective voice was strengthened by threatening a possible exit (Hirschman 1970). By striking, teachers entered their

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concerns over working conditions and care duties into matters of public and political discourse.

Yet such claims met friction from the surrounding community, many of whom disapproved of teachers' use of economic arguments for care labour, revealing liberalism's limited evaluation of affective labour, and therefore, predominantly women's work (Fraser 1997; Lynch, Baker, and Lyons 2009). First, liberal accords relegated affective needs to the private sphere, offering neither measure nor metric of care work. Instead, mostly women care workers, such as teachers, were seen as compelled by 'natural instinct' for tending to the needs of others, such as students. The belief of a presumed 'naturalised calling' not only ignored the intellectual and emotional skills required of care work, it justified low wages for women. Tending to the complex needs of students was in fact beyond material value, went the argument and therefore could not possibly be captured by pay (Lynch, Baker, and Lyons 2009). Furthermore, in the late 1970s, striking teachers' demands for increased value of their 'immaterial labour' ran counter to the loss of 'material' industrial labour experienced by white, working-class men at this time. Therefore, teachers' attempt to exercise both exit and voice – by way of a strike – met an onslaught of non-support, first and foremost from the surrounding community, and more subtly, from supporting teachers across the state, as we shall soon see.

Finally, Hortonville's community members' response to the teachers' union strikes highlights a fundamental contradiction of teachers' unions as organised care workers: teachers were granted the legal right to unionise but *not* to strike (Shelton 2013). Popular belief held that by striking, teachers reneged their social obligation to care and educate students. Yet this contradiction illuminates a core dilemma collective in conditions of care workers under liberalism. If care workers, such as teachers, are defined by their relationship to dependents, what *independent* rights does the worker have? And, importantly, how do these rights operate on an individual *and* collective levels (Abel and Nelson 1990; Lynch, Baker, and Lyons 2009)?

The not-strike: social justice unionism, racial contracts and rural-urban divides

The reaction of Hortonville's external community – townspeople, parents and other unionists – was not the only significant response; the statewide teachers' union reaction also revealed important cracks in liberalism's foundation. Whereas the state AFL-CIO unequivocally called for a statewide strike, WEAC presented members with a range of options and ultimately left the final decision to union locals (*Stevens Point Daily Journal* 1974). In a pamphlet to membership calling for support, WEAC asked its members to support the striking teachers, but did not mandate any form of action.

> Our organization wishes to convey to you our willingness and eagerness to help you in whatever way we can in joining your actions and your fights because we feel that what happens to one of us happens to all of us. ("It Happened in Hortonville" 1974)

Furthermore, WEAC implored its statewide members to frame their collective identities as workers, rather than as an association of professionals. They explicitly acknowledged this shift and called members to action accordingly. They wrote:

> The help and support of unions is critical … We recognize the criticism that occasionally comes to us from some unions that we are not well-established in the labor movement. It is true that in the past we viewed ourselves as an association. We had no bargaining laws

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> or any regulation governing public employee laws. With the advent of collective bargaining, we have moved into the labor movement very deeply and we believe effectively. As a state organization, we see ourselves as very much a union of workers. ("It Happened in Hortonville" 1974)

After the court ordered an injunction against the picketing teachers, WEAC decided to put forward a vote to ratify a call for a one-day statewide sympathy strike, but again required that locals determine such a decision. Affirming a commitment to democratic decision-making from locals to guide the state's decision-making, WEAC spokesman Leonard Jacobs stated, 'There is no way the state or regional units can mandate this. This is going to be a grass-roots effort' (Stevens Point Daily Journal 1974). It was a fateful strategic choice.

Despite widespread support for the striking Hortonville teachers, the vote for a statewide sympathy strike failed by a four to one margin. The statewide solidarity vote failed in large part due to insufficient support from the state's largest locals. Milwaukee, Kenosha and Racine did not vote in favour of the action, echoing the calls from the state superintendent that teachers should not violate their own contracts by participating in a solidarity walk-out. As the president of the MTEA said, 'The executive committee feels that it would be very unproductive for Milwaukee to strike. It would be a violation of our contract, and we are working to make good relations with the school board' (*The Racine Journal Times* 1974a).

Though large unions were willing to provide statements of support and monetary donations for the Hortonville teachers, they were not willing to support sympathetic job actions. MTEA's decision to not participate in the statewide sympathy strike was particularly curious, since the relative strength of the union and the labour-friendly environment of Milwaukee minimised potential risks for Milwaukee teachers. Furthermore, Lauri Wynn, the president of WEAC and proponent of a statewide direct action campaign, was herself a former Milwaukee school teacher and MTEA member. Given MTEA's internal strength, its political sympathies with the striking Hortonville teachers, and its direct connection to the statewide leadership group, why did its members vote overwhelmingly against participating in the strike? This decision reveals several important tendencies forming in the union at the time.

First, it displayed tensions within the Milwaukee teacher union between a conservative executive body and progressive factions of the membership. The executive board of the union voted against the solidarity strike before members took a vote, setting the tone for the rest of the union. On Monday 22 April 1974, the board voted 13-2 against the proposed strike (MTEA Executive Board Minutes, April 22 1974). When MTEA membership voted on the issue two days later, the vote also failed. Though the board recommended that MTEA members send money to HEA and support HEA through its pickets and actions, it would not conduct a solidarity strike. However, not all teachers agreed. As one teacher scribbled on a note clipped to her check to the HEA Donation Fund: 'From a Milwaukee teacher who voted to support your cause. Thoroughly disgusted with the position of the MTEA's executive committee on your strike. Good luck. More money to come.'[8]

Second, it revealed growing antagonism between local unions and the statewide federation. During the spring 1974, members of MTEA's Executive Board had begun questioning the nature of their relationship with WEAC more generally, and had begun formally discussing disaffiliation. MTEA president Don Feilbach argued his local spent too much money on dues to WEAC for too little in return, and questioned what the additional $40

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in dues to WEAC provided to MTEA. Feilbach contended WEAC needed MTEA for its large membership and dues revenue more than MTEA needed WEAC as an organisational, legal or political resource. As he said, 'We are not paying for what we are getting. We are paying five times for it … What Milwaukee has always done is help the state association provide services for the rest of the state' (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* 1974).

In addition to an objection based on sheer cost for MTEA members, Feilbach and others in MTEA disagreed with the social justice programme WEAC had begun to develop. Perhaps most significantly WEAC executive secretary Morris Andrews and Wynn had begun to re-consider teacher seniority – a union stronghold issue – in order to prioritise racial integration of teaching staff. This signalled a major pivot in teacher union priorities, from the protection of individual rights to advocating for collective justice. In addition, WEAC had begun to actively engage with a broad range of social issues and educational improvements beyond the struggle for teachers' wages and benefits, organising campaigns for additional state aid for schools, migrant workers' rights, racial integration, neighbourhood action groups and women's rights. Andrews described the reasons for the union's turn towards a social justice mission beyond teachers' material interests. He stated, 'I think we have a responsibility to do this. We have to make sure the teacher fulfils the role of making the democratic process work' (Bednarek 1974).

The political vision of the leadership of the statewide union marked a significant re-working of the racial contract embedded within education and unionism alike (Mills 1997; Glenn 2002; Fletcher 2008; Leonardo 2013). Teachers' employing contracts, a staple of liberal accords, was often used not only to advance teachers' professional rights, but also to provide legal structure for white supremacy, a dynamic made vivid by the Ocean-Hills Brownsville strikes of 1968 (Podair 2002; Perlstein 2004; Perillo 2012): white teachers increasingly turned to professionalism's platform of 'transfer' rights to a more specific version: the right to 'transfer-out-of-poor-black-schools.' Even more alarmingly, teachers formed unions as a means to secure legal protection to administer corporal punishment to black students (Dougherty 2004). By the 1950s and 1960s, 'teachers increasingly framed their struggles as one about freedom *from* the influence of black parents and activists' (Perillo 2012, 8). This dynamic was especially true in Milwaukee, which was on its way to becoming the nation's most racially segregated city (Miner 2013).

Don Feilbach, president of MTEA, did not view WEAC's burgeoning social justice mission as the way towards a stronger political environment, but rather a violation of MTEA's 'local control.' MTEA wanted to be able to retain control over all decisions, rather than having the statewide federation set conditions and policies for teachers' units. As MTEA's executive director James Colter claimed, 'At present WEAC wants complete control, whereas Milwaukee and other urban affiliates want to make decisions within their local jurisdiction' (Rosario 1974). Milwaukee in particular felt it had sufficient power on its own, deeming the benefits of joining the statewide federation irrelevant. Echoing eerily similar arguments to those deployed by the Hortonville school board, who wanted local control over education in order to protect the town from outsiders such as teachers and unionists, the Milwaukee teachers' unions used the idea of 'local control' as a way to justify the protection of MTEA's autonomy from the state federation's political project (*Milwaukee Journal* 1974).[9]

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Yet, MTEA's desire for 'local control' was coded with a growing sense of 'freedom from' – that is, freedom from anti-white supremacy and legal forms of redistribution and recognition – echoing a mounting conservatism (Foner 1999; Mohan and Stokke 2000; Apple 2006; Anderson 2015). In Hortonville, rural conservative forces argued for local control of school districts to guard against outsiders and calls for higher taxes. In Milwaukee, local control was used to protect political conservatism of those who were not willing to adhere to the social justice oriented political programme of the statewide federation. In both rural and urban cases, calls for 'local control' excluded possibilities for broader, widespread solidarity, or, the willingness to surrender immediate short-term advantages for the sake of a longer-term, more egalitarian advantage. Therefore, the union's turn to a rights bestowed by 'local control' created a number of problems on its own, exacerbating – not correcting – the errors of liberalism (Lichtenstein 2002). In the case of the Hortonville strike, it exacerbated internal contradictions within teachers' unions, specifically along race, the value of affective labour and unions' power to strike.

Competing understandings of the statewide teachers' union strategy was evident in a public discussion between WEAC leadership and MTEA members in May 1974 about the impacts of statewide affiliation impacted MTEA. Although MTEA members were concerned that WEAC affiliation would mean that 'the state will come in and tell [MTEA] what to do,' Wynn and Andrews corrected this position, reassuring members that WEAC wanted Milwaukee to be a powerful local and for teachers to have power over their working conditions. However, they disagreed with the MTEA's understanding of local control, particularly given MTEA's commitment to use local control as a means to avoid school integration. Frustrated with MTEA's resistance towards enacting socially progressive policies, Andrews bemoaned: 'Milwaukee should be a powerful local. Things should have been done in social issues. Power is only what you chose to do with it. MTEA evidently doesn't want to use theirs' ("Riverside Meeting Minutes, May 7" 1974).

The decision of large locals like MTEA to not to support the strike changed the calculation for teachers from smaller locals. For teachers in small-school districts who empathised with Hortonville teachers, the contractual illegality of striking was secondary to the need to stand up for their collective rights. As one teacher bluntly put it, 'I think when you're down, you got nothing to lose.'[10] Madison attorney John Lawton, whose firm represented the Wisconsin Council of Country and Municipal Employees, the State Employees Union, as well as police officers, fire-fighters and teachers, commented on the particular vulnerability of small-school districts to take job actions. He said,

> In an urban area which is somewhat labor oriented, it's very unlikely a municipal employer would attempt such a thing. The size of the work force, the skills involved, and community attitudes – all are important. I think it does put the small union in a small town and rural area at a terrible disadvantage. (Hinant 1976)

A teacher from Germantown, Wisconsin described the impacts of the large-district's vote against the sympathy strike on small-school districts, noting that the loss of solidarity from the larger school districts weakened the impact of small schools' actions:

> See, I come from an association of about 70 people, less than what Hortonville has. And there's a lot of insecurity when you only have got seventy people … But at least what you people have is, you're working with numbers. And I think looking from the small schools stand point, when we saw that, well, Milwaukee isn't going to go out and a couple of the other

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> larger schools aren't going to go out, you're kind of sticking your neck out, because you don't know how many other people are going to go out.[11]

In response to this failed vote, WEAC announced a major strategy shift: away from direct action strategies, and towards legal advancements. As HEA President Mike Wisnoski stated, 'We will lobby to get legislation which will assure that the Hortonville situation will never happen again, and seek financial support for upcoming litigation' (*The Racine Journal Times* 1974b). WEAC president reflected upon the failed solidarity strike vote and announced that the teachers union would redirect its strategy towards legal advocacy rather than direct action.

> We would hope that the public would understand that our concern for the Hortonville teachers have not died, but rather has turned in another direction. We have been in the courts and we will be in the courts. We will be at the Legislature so that they can understand that the law under which we find ourselves working is a deformed law and needs to be changed. (Holter 1999)

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After Hortonville: the rise of opportunism

Over the next months, WEAC mobilised members and lobbyists to advance legislation to resolve bargaining impasses without striking, primarily through provisions of compulsory interest arbitration.[12] As a public radio broadcaster, Ed Hinshaw, announced the weekend after the failed solidarity strike,

> The Hortonville school strike leaves us with one – and only one – solid, positive development. It is the clear demonstration of the uselessness of the state law on collective bargaining for public employees. The law simply does not work … The problem with the law is that it has no method of forcing agreements between the unions and public boards and councils. The solution is painful, but obvious. The state must create a system of compulsory mediation and arbitration to resolve those disputes which cannot be settled at the local level. (Hinshaw 1974)

Under these provisions, a neutral third-party sets the terms of a new contract, rather than disputing the existing contract, a procedure known as grievance arbitration. Interest arbitration is generally considered to be a legal alternative to a strike (Anderson and Krause 1987). In Wisconsin, this legal provision was first granted to police officers in 1972. In 1975, when it was proposed to extend to teachers and other municipal employees, urban and rural teachers in Wisconsin showed divided support.[13]

Labour scholars frequently credit the event in Hortonville as a decisive factor in securing interest arbitration for public-sector employees. However, Hortonville also constitutes a concrete pivot in the strategy of teachers' unions towards legislative channels as the best means to recognise their rights, rather than building the solidarity and militancy of teachers. Indeed, Wisconsin's unique political and legislative support of public-sector unionism provided a strategic context for public-sector unions to secure their legal survival, without having to risk more Hortonvilles. While this calculation may have granted short-term legal safety for the labour movement, it failed to develop stronger forms of labour organising – workers' power to dialogically determine their interests and develop widespread solidarity with other workers and community members to transcend the narrow and economic interests of employers, be they businessmen or administrators.

It represented a shift from understanding the important labour mechanisms of striking and bargaining as rights enjoyed by workers, to privileges granted by politicians and judges (Burns 2014). It also abandoned the formation of the collective identity of teachers as workers capable of exercising a political voice that is publicly recognised and valued. It side-stepped the question of teachers' right to strike, and therefore de-centered both the solidarity and collective identity necessary for effective job actions, and importantly, for the issues that are central to teachers' lives as workers, such as the need for just compensation for their affective labour and for programmes of racial solidarity. Finally, it minimised the legitimacy of teachers' independent rights as care workers,

The neoliberal logics of collective action

WEAC's shift in strategy represents what political sociologists Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal (1980) call an opportunistic logic of collective action. For Offe and Wiesenthal, opportunism is the tendency for working-class organisation to move along parliamentary and electoral channels to gain power, strategically self-limiting the means and forms of struggles. They characterise opportunism in three mains ways. First, it typically inverts means and ends, pursuing institutional and readily available mechanisms, over the organisational priorities. Second, opportunism prioritises short-term gains over long-term struggles and consequences. Finally, opportunism focuses on quantitative factors, such as number of supportive votes, recruits or financial contributions, rather than qualitative factors, such as the formation and expression of collective identities (Somers 1994; Melucci 1995).

Put briefly, Offe and Wiesenthal suggest opportunism is both a rational and unstable system for working-class organisations. Working-class organisations, Offe and Wiesenthal remind us, derive their primary power from: (1) their ability to democratically and deliberatively determine their interests and priorities; and (2) their ability to withhold their labour, through systematically organised job actions such as strikes. Yet in order to successfully bargain demands, such organisations must often concede this broader power to actualise the specific demands. This creates a contradictory moment for working-class organisations. They must simultaneously develop democratic strengths and militancy amongst its members – what Offe and Wiesenthal calls its 'dialogic power' – to suggest a sufficient threat to the employer at the bargaining table. But they must simultaneously concede this power in order to maintain the organisational legitimacy and achieve bargaining successes.

As Offe and Wiesenthal suggest, organisations must make their survival 'as independent as possible of the motivation, the solidarity, and the "willingness to act" of the members,' making a transition to opportunism necessary, as it is 'neither threatens the survival of the organisation, nor interferes with its chance of success' (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). To conduct the opportunist transformation, unions must substitute external survival guarantees for the internal sources of power and dialogic logics. Notably, these guarantees are typically accorded when social democratic parties are in power, especially when these parties are both willing and able to provide institutional support and sanctions. This, Offe and Wiesenthal point out, is a very rational solution to the problems of working-class collective action. Yet, it is also unstable, for it moves the provision of working-class power to an external source, rather than an internal one. Put simply, the organisation is no longer

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able to 'guarantee the guarantees,' but instead relies up on the state to do so. When political conditions shift, as they nearly always will, the organisation is significantly weakened, posing long-term instability in the opportunistic strategy. In order to overcome this instability, organisations must re-orient their strategy to their key power elements – the willingness of members to act – in a wider terrain of political, legal and institutional arrangements.

Conclusion

Wisconsin's statewide teachers' union's, WEAC, shift towards legal and electoral channels after the failed solidarity strike post-Hortonville exemplifies Offe and Wiesenthal's notion of opportunism. First, WEAC inverted means and ends. It decided to pursue the swelling tide of legal support for public-sector unions by advancing interest arbitration lobbying, instead of advancing the underlying struggle: whether or not teachers have a right to strike, and how to build solidarity for such a struggle. Second, it prioritised the short-term gains of legislative action, rather than the long-term struggle to secure democratic and collective voice of teachers in their workplace. Finally, it abandoned the deeper dynamics developing in Hortonville: teachers' understanding of themselves as workers standing in solidarity with each other, amidst a broader social context. As Joseph McCartin highlights, advancing claims for justice through appeals to rights alone can easily be countered by counter rights claims (McCartin 2012). For example, the right to unions has been successfully countered by a call for a right to freedom from unions (e.g. 'right to work'). Or in the case of Hortonville, potential allies in the Milwaukee teachers' union can also adopt the claim to 'local control' used by the conservative school board.

The central issue raised by the Hortonville strike was what form of voice and action are legitimately available to teachers, or more bluntly, whether or not teachers should strike. This issue is grounded in a larger set of questions about the need for a strong public education system, as well as the type of public voice legitimately available to care workers. In the face of violent repression, hostile administrators and weak solidarity among rural and urban unions, the statewide teachers' organisation consolidated their energy and tactics, and turned towards external provisions to secure the rights of teachers. This adoption of opportunism rationally looked to the sympathetic state to preserve teachers rights, by mandating interest arbitration as a bargaining impasse technique when it became evident that local school boards and administrators may not actually respond to teachers' attempts to bargain.

However, as the recent political climate suggests, turning to the state alone to recognise the rights of public-sector employees, much less the central issues of public education, can be an unstable solution, as it depends on the nature of the reigning political power. This article shows that teachers' union attempts to *maximise* their political power vacated the potential to *reconfigure* their political power in the face of rising conservatism. As a result, the union was not able to create a new political discourse that: valorised teaching work as a form of public care labour; bolstered the rights of teachers' unions to strike; developed solidarity with other teachers around the state; and reformed the educational racial contract. To this day, the costs of not having such a political vocabulary remains high.

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Re-examining the 1974 Hortonville teachers' strike suggests that in order for teachers' unions to resist the inequalities imposed by neoliberalism, they must overcome the limitations of liberalism. They must reckon with the liberalism's rights-based discourse and its imposed contradictions, specifically along race, care work and unions' power to strike. Teachers' unions will need to reconfigure their power in ways that value the affective components of teachers' work, rather than bending to the contours of neoliberal pressures.

Notes

1. Oral History Interview with Ed Golnick, Tape 4/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
2. Also, see 'Oral interview with Hortonville teachers, Tape 38/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS' for a longer discussion of Hortonville's alternative and experimental pedagogies.
3. Oral interview with Hortonville teachers, Tape 38/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
4. Oral interview with self-identified vigilantes. Tape 56/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
5. Golnick, Tape 4/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
6. Oral interview with Hortonville mill-owner, Tape 54/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
7. Oral interview with Hortonville teachers, Tape 38/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
8. Un-authored letter, Disaffiliation folder, MTEA Archives.
9. Interestingly, despite MTEA's calls for devolved democratic control, internally they operated using representational system. Only building representatives, for example, were allowed to vote to in disaffiliation debate, leaving the majority of the 5800 teachers in the district without 'local control.'
10. Oral interview with Hortonville teachers, Tape 38/Side 1, WEAC Records, WHS.
11. Oral interview with unidentified teachers from Chippewa Falls, Germantown, and Stanley, Tape 45/Side 2, WEAC Records, WHS.
12. Notably, an assembly bill (AB 758) proposed in 1974 would have legalised strikes for public-sector employees, provided they notify the employer ahead of time they intended to strike. The bill, however, did not pass.
13. The provision of interest arbitration remained contested for other reasons beyond its alternative to a strike – many school teachers felt it gave employers and school boards the upper hand in bargaining. For more details on this debate, see (*Stevens Point Daily Journal* 1977).

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