



Teachers Beyond the Law: How Teachers Changed Their World

Oscar Weil

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"Before the late 1950s and the early 1960s, teachers in Illinois and the rest of the country generally did not participate in a formal process to establish their salaries and working conditions or to influence policies that affected the nature and quality of their services. Teachers beyond the Law tells how a group of groundbreaking educators organized unions and established collective bargaining as a process to determine their own economic and professional destinies.

Because the laws of the state and nation not only gave little recognition to their rights but also actually established multiple layers of legal and bureaucratic barriers to their unions, teachers and their leaders were frequently punished for using traditional union methods to assert their rights as citizens and professionals. They were discriminated against or fired for joining unions or participating in union activities. Courts routinely enjoined their unions from striking, sometimes without a hearing, and jailed leaders and members for refusing to cease striking until they had negotiated satisfactory agreements with their employers.

The Illinois Federation of Teachers successfully opposed many efforts to pacify teachers and other public employees with legislative bills that would have mandated recognition of their unions but also prohibited strikes. Finally, in 1983, after decades of effort and self-sacrifice by union leaders and members, the Illinois legislature and governor enacted laws regulating and supporting collective bargaining for teachers and other public employees without restrictions on the right to strike.

Teachers beyond the Law tells the true story of how these courageous teachers took a stand and changed the world."

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