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John F. Lyons. *Teachers and Reform: Chicago Public Education, 1929-1970.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 312 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03272-1.

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Teachers, Unions, and the Chicago Context

John F. Lyons's book, *Teachers and Reform*, is a history of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) as it struggled for existence and identity between the Great Depression and the late 1960s. The title is somewhat of a misnomer, as the book is not a full history of twentieth-century Chicago educational reform or teachers, but a political history of teacher unions in that most union of all towns, Chicago. This makes the book extremely useful for labor historians interested in the institutional development of the nation's first and most prominent teachers' union.

Lyons's goal is two-fold: to explain the uniqueness of teacher union history in Chicago and to lay out the narrative history of the CTU. He is more successful in the second of these tasks, and this is in no way an easy task given the intensely complicated play of interests in Chicago school politics across the last century. A history of the CTU has long been needed: the bulk of studies of Chicago educational history center on the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century rise of the Chicago Teachers' Federation and its links to Progressive-Era institutions, such as settlement houses, the woman's suffrage movement, and the Chicago labor movement. Most of these accounts end in the 1930s, before the founding of the CTU, with an ambiguous resolution that teachers' political authority was compromised by opposing drives for white-collar professionalization and blue-collar unionization.

According to Lyons, all this changed in the economic firestorm of the 1930s. Because of the particularly dysfunctional educational fiscal system of Chicago, where 90 percent of school funding came from real estate taxes, and the particularly corrupt political machinations of the city government, the Depression hit Chicago public schools harder than any other American city, and was particularly debilitating to public school teachers. On one day in 1933, for example, the Chicago Board of Education voted to fire 1,400 Chicago teachers, or 10 percent of the workforce, thereby increasing the workload of the remainder. More cuts and months of payless paydays were to follow. Meanwhile, the politically connected school janitors and construction workers were largely protected.

Lyons argues that the chimera of professionalism and longstanding divisions prevented Chicago teachers from effective organization against these conditions until 1937 when teachers formed the CTU. Within a year, it was the largest teachers' union in the country, with over two-thirds of Chicago teachers holding membership, and it remained so until the rise of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City in the early 1960s.

Forged in fire, the CTU then began to smolder. In its early years, the union was progressive and activist, following the vision of social reconstructionists that public education should take a lead in creating a more socially just society. But, by 1940, the union had backslid into bargains and patronage deals with city government, and conservative political positions, including the persecution of communists. Lyons covers this dreary political period quite well, noting the conservative business unionism that permeated the CTU through the 1940s. For readers new to teacher union politics who are under the misguided belief that teacher unions may be less contentious than industrial unions, chapter 3 will be an eye-opener. Especially notable, and grim, was the leadership's resistance to the single salary scale, which recognized the equal value and labor of elementary and secondary school teaching, a cause first supported by the National Education Association in 1921, and a major motivation of the largely female elementary teacher corps. Pressured by its powerful male secondary teachers, the CTU was one of the last teachers' unions, and Chicago was one of the last cities, to adopt the single salary scale.

The second half of the book chronicles the CTU's response to Cold War politics, the emerging struggle for

collective bargaining, the ongoing racial segregation of Chicago schools and school politics, and the role of civil rights activism in the 1960s. Lyons attributes the CTU's progress, or lack thereof, in these matters to the ongoing embroilment of the union in city politics, and to different levels of alienation between the union leadership and its wide and often internally divided membership.

Lyons's portrait of the early CTU is of a modern power-brokering political organization that secured deals with the city's Democratic political machine, and that took strategic and largely conservative stands on school segregation and gender equity for the purpose of maintaining power. Continually divided within by race, class, gender, and elementary and secondary teaching levels, and constantly battling financial cutbacks from city government and political attacks from those who opposed public sector and teacher unionization, the CTU also wrestled with the universal dilemma that plagues all teacher unions: to attend to bread and butter issues to benefit and protect teachers, or to act as an agent of educational and social reform to benefit children and parents. The examination of this tension has long been a staple of teacher union histories, but Lyons takes the argument deeper by exploring the political manifestations in the particular context of Chicago urban politics.

The book is an excellent contribution to the narrative history of the CTU, but it may be less useful for those interested in the social history of teachers and schools. Especially through the first chapters, the book is a traditional political history, emphasizing the formal union structure, with little reference to the social history of teachers' work, or the political or cultural geography and history of Chicago schools. Divisions between teachers are discussed in some depth (particularly interesting is the notion of generational difference in 1960s teachers corps), but Lyons rarely gets much closer than these large groupings of teachers. Lyons's attention to individual teachers develops more in the modern period, when he relies on a large number of oral histories that he conducted with teachers and administrators. Also tempting, but largely unexplored, is biographical analysis of the first and very influential leaders of the union, John Fewkes and Kermit Eby, and the extent to which their particular backgrounds and political beliefs shaped the early CTU and its later legacy. Finally, although Lyons is successful in his goal of explaining the uniqueness of teacher union history in Chicago, the impact of his findings are unclear. Certainly, Lyons contributes a much-needed history of teacher unions in Chicago, thus enriching the labor history of that city. But how does that information help us better understand the teacher union history of other cities? The CTU may be such an anomaly that it might not offer many lessons outside of its own city boundaries.

My sense is that Lyons's primary goal was in chronicling the complicated history of the union, and in this he was quite successful. His conclusion returns to the issue of the ongoing and multiple dividing tensions within teachers' work. These problems remain unresolved, as we can see in any review of contemporary teacher politics. Lyons's book offers a roadmap to how one city got us here, laying out, in as clear a manner as possible, the dense thicket of issues at stake and at play in the teacher union movement.

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