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Terry Moe's latest book about teachers' unions and educational policy derives from an argument that is fairly familiar to political scientists but is too often ignored in understanding the context and power dynamics of public policy: that policy arenas tend to get captured by economically self-interested organized interests that receive material benefits from certain types of policy outcomes. This is of particular consequence when the policy arena involves a "public good," such as education, because the public interest involved tends not to be as well represented by organized political groups. So, policy debates over clean air are unduly dominated by the auto and coal industries, debates over safer streets unduly dominated by the gun industry and police officers, debates over prison conditions are unduly dominated by the prison guard unions, and debates over public health unduly dominated by the likes of the tobacco industry, pharmaceutical industry, and medical doctors who, because of their own economic stakes in the matter, promote their own interests over the broader public welfare.

Moe applies this argument to public education in the United States. He casts teachers' unions as representing the major economic interest, who fight to defend their own jobs at the expense of the public interest, the educational achievement of America's children. In Chapter 2, he nicely documents how teachers came to be a powerful influence in public education. Unions provide teachers a range of important tangible benefits, from job security, health care, and pension benefits to a meaningful voice in collective bargaining. As he shows through survey data in Chapter 3, teachers are very supportive of and happy with their unions for all of these reasons. In Chapters 4–6, he provides evidence of union influence over public school boards, and how these unions, through their collective bargaining agreements with their employers, have achieved a range of benefits and job security, an average of roughly 10 sick days a year, and an average salary of just under \$54,000 that also allows for a nice unpaid summer vacation. These chapters provide a well-executed illustration of how and why a concentrated interest emerges and gains a certain degree of political entrenchment in a policy domain.

Moe does not want to simply use political and institutional analysis to explain the place of teachers' unions in the United States, however; he wants to make a much bigger claim that the existence of teachers' unions are fundamentally at odds with education policy. The biggest problem, he argues, is that teachers' unions are protected

by collective-bargaining agreements that provide job security, restrictions on job duties, and other benefits that detract from the resources and flexibility at the disposal of public school administrators trying to improve educational quality in schools and the best interests of the children. For instance, union contracts demand a fairly rigorous set of procedures that must be followed before someone can be fired. This claim is straightforward and empirically true. As with all job-security clauses in any industry, due process means that even the guilty have a chance to prove their innocence before being convicted/terminated.

One might wonder, however, why he puts so much focus on the job security and due process rights of public school teachers. After all, although many lower-wage workers and some higher-wage workers in America are "at will," meaning that they can be terminated for any reason, security procedures are common for many well- and reasonably well-paid workers in America. For instance, my university, and no doubt Moe's university, grants professors of all ranks the opportunity to contest their termination, with a long, slow, and costly procedural process that allows for numerous hearings, responses, and review. Moe points out that the cost of firing a bad public school teacher can average to more than \$200,000 (p. 186), but this hardly compares to the multimillion-dollar settlements and buyouts of bad bankers and other financiers, university administrators and professors, corporate and public regulators, highly paid athletes, lawyers, doctors, and a wide range of executives. Indeed, the buyouts of wealthy employees, top-level managers, and even senior professors, sometimes in situations where they are accused of being not just "bad" at their job but also corrupt, unethical, or straight-out committers of illegal acts, has been an all-too-common headline in the first years of twenty-first-century America.

Moe may wish to argue that public education is different, with a sole purpose being to "educate children. And because this is so, everything about the public schools—how they are staffed, how they are funded, and more generally how they are organized to do their work—should be decided with the best interests of children in mind" (p. 3). Maybe. But is it so easy to demarcate those jobs where the goals can allow for some self-interest of workers that might entitle them to certain rights, and those jobs where the public interest is so overwhelming (like being a public school teacher) that we simply cannot afford the workers any rights? Are public school teachers more important than police officers, firefighters, airline pilots, military personnel, mass transit drivers, garbage collectors, health workers, or other educators? What about government representatives who have the power to put Americans in harm's way, or bankers and financiers armed with security clauses who have the power to make decisions that can profoundly alter our economy with a spiral of implications?

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The author clearly does not sympathize with public school teachers, suggesting that they are overpaid at an average salary of \$54,000, and criticizing those who work in the dangerous and difficult schools in Cleveland, Detroit, and Newark for taking a few too many sick and personal-leave days. He is more sympathetic with their supervisors and administrators, who, he claims, only want to improve our children's educational attainments, as well as the business community, who have a "deeply felt concern about the connection between the quality of public education and the quality of the nation's workforce" (p. 291). But he does not address whether school administrators might also have other considerations in mind when they seek to undermine teachers' unions, whether they have an incentive to maintain the peace at a school, and thus terminate a great but potentially disruptive teacher, or whether these administrators are motivated by a desire to please their own bosses who often have electoral motivations, and thus are looking for a way to reduce budgets and taxes by cutting expenses, salaries, and benefits.

Moe makes similarly one-sided claims about the power of teachers in union elections: "Teachers unions are among the most powerful interest groups of *any* type in *any* area of public policy," more than bankers, lawyers, realtors, and any other group. His data show that teachers' unions were "the nation's top contributors to federal elections from 1989 through 2009" (p. 8). In fact, he finds that "teachers unions out-contribute business in almost every single state" (p. 292). Although teachers' unions do spend considerable sums of money in campaigns, this is an eye-opening claim. Is it true? Well, at the least, in a court of law, it would not be "false." It is true in the sense that he 1) does not include independent expenditures (the area that was of direct controversy in the recent Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United*); 2) does not include spending by individuals (the largest form of campaign contributions); and 3) does not include spending by interest or industry groups. (Based on a November 2011 scan of *opensecrets.org*, the broad category "public sector unions," of which teachers' unions would be one part, ranks 28th in donations by industries giving to members of Congress in the 2011–12 election cycle.) He focuses, instead, solely on direct contributions by political action committees (PACs).

In order to claim then that teachers' unions are at the top of that list of campaign spending (given that if one eyeballs the list, one sees AT&T at the top), he proceeds to add together the two teacher-union PACs (the National Education Association [NEA] and the American Federation of Teachers [AFT]) and finds that, together, their direct contributions in the years between 1989 and 2008 were more than any other single PAC. The two combined spent \$59 million in direct contributions, more than (now) second-place AT&T at \$46 million, more than Goldman Sachs' \$33 million, Citigroup's \$28 million, and the Amer-

ican Bankers Association's \$24 million. Combining the teacher-union PACs makes sense, but why does the same logic not apply to combining banker PACs, telecom PACs, and the like? His response is to claim that even when he combines "all business associations into one 'group,'" he finds that, at the state level, "*the teachers unions are typically outgunning them*" (p. 292; original emphasis). But how do we make sense of this incredible power of teachers' unions over business associations when *opensecrets.org*'s list of "top lobbyists," is headed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which gave federal officials \$785 billion between 1998 and 2011?

To argue that teachers' unions "have played an integral role" in the failure of American public education (p. 14), he needs to confront the fact that the highest levels of education attainment domestically and internationally are in areas with the highest concentration of unionized teachers, such as Massachusetts. He also needs to account for the reasons that states such as South Carolina rank *last in both* teachers' union membership and public education standards. His answer is that a comparison between South Carolina and Massachusetts is unfair because there are "countless other factors that affect achievement" (p. 208). Fair enough. But these "countless other factors" get less weight when he is looking to place responsibility on unions for lower school achievement elsewhere.

After quickly dispensing with the vast majority of the academic literature in education policy that has failed to find much of an outcome regarding the impact of collective-bargaining agreements on student attainment on the grounds that this research is weakened by methodological control problems that cannot disentangle differing effects, he moves swiftly through two studies that he believes are exemplary in showing a direct link between unions and bad schools. One is by the economist Caroline Hoxby, published in 1996; the second is Moe's own study of California schools, where he finds a negative relationship between a more restrictive collective-bargaining agreement and student achievement. But, he admits that he only finds conclusive results in certain circumstances. "The estimated impact for the smaller districts, those with less than 20,000 students," he finds, "is essentially zero" (p. 212). Again, fair enough, and providing the pros and cons of the research is exactly what a good social scientist is supposed to do.

It is thus surprising, then—after admitting that his research is not conclusive, and that "many more studies and many more years of work are needed to create a literature that can nail down all the details with scientific confidence"—that he concludes: "[W]e don't need to know every last detail to have a good sense of what is happening here. We have a great deal of evidence to go on, from a variety of sources, and when we step back from it all and take in the bigger picture, the basic themes that come through are exceedingly straightforward. It is a simple fact

that . . . labor contracts are filled with rules that are adopted for reasons that have *nothing to do with what is best for children*” (p. 214, original emphasis). So, on the one hand, Moe rightly qualifies his quite tenuous findings, as he should because the research in this area has found very little in the way of meaningful conclusions. But, on the other hand, he immediately “steps back” and makes hugely inflammatory conclusions about teachers’ unions.

Public schools need help and political scientists have much to offer this important policy debate. Moe is absolutely right that teachers’ unions are a concentrated interest worthy of study in any comprehensive understanding of education policy. I have no doubt that there are bad teachers and school districts in need of meaningful reform; as a product of public schools, I have had my share of both brilliant and horrific teachers. But this book is entirely one-sided. One side is portrayed as self-interested, powerful, and disruptive of student needs. The other side is portrayed as wanting only what is good for our children. The good and simultaneously weak side includes some politicians, administrators, and business leaders. The bad and powerful side—teachers and their unions—make an average salary of just under \$54,000 a year.

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The 1990 publication of John Chubb and Terry Moe’s *Politics, Markets and American Schools* marked the beginnings of a new school of thought in education policy. Rather than engage the existing field of educational research on its own terms, Chubb and Moe utilized an institutionalist version of rational choice theory to make an overarching argument about the organizational structure of public education. Proceeding from first principles of a Hobbesian-styled “market man” and the organizational superiority of markets, they argued that the democratic governance of American public education was “inherently destructive of school autonomy and inherently conducive to bureaucracy.”¹ If educational innovation and mission-driven schools were to flourish, they contended, school leaders must be “emancipated” from democratic control and oversight and given the autocratic powers of a corporate chief executive officer over the educational enterprise. To accomplish this end, an educational marketplace must replace the public provision of education.

A small but politically influential circle of academics took shape in the wake of Chubb and Moe’s analysis, employing similar methodology and espousing similar policy prescriptions for the commodification of schooling in an educational marketplace. From the start, the work of these academics was marked by policy advocacy and political commitment: It provided not disinterested scholarly analyses but intellectual engagement on behalf of the market transformation of American education. As a consequence, it quickly came into conflict with teacher unionism. There is no more central value to teacher unions than their dedication to *public* education, rooted in their belief that education is a public good, essential to the development of an educated citizenry and to the democratic self-rule of that citizenry. In the teacher union creed, all Americans must have access to a free, quality education that is publically provided and democratically accountable to the public.

While the conflict between these two opposed visions of education is certainly a matter of intellectual contestation, it has a more important dimension, as it is directly implicated in actual political struggle over the direction of American education. In recent years, a remarkably cohesive political coalition of wealth and power has been mobilized on behalf of market reforms of public education; if it were not for the countervailing political power of teacher unions, that policy agenda would certainly have been victorious.² As the balance of power in this political struggle became clear, the market school extended its criticisms of

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