

Public Employees' Power Expanding

PUBLIC employees may have become the largest single power bloc in municipal politics, even though their candidates don't always win.

In Oklahoma City elections, city workers, firemen, and policemen seem to be wooed more aggressively by candidates than unorganized voters. Teachers' unions are big targets for state candidates.

These particular groups are actively seeking additional concessions and office-seekers are aware they will try to get out votes for those who appear to support their positions, whether or not outright commitments are made.

Unions as a whole have been declining in percentages of workers for a number of years, but that does not mean unions are losing power. By concentrating on vital political points, union bosses are increasing their domination of jobs without assuming greater accountability.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is reported to

have more than a million members, four times what it had 15 years ago, and may be the biggest union in AFL-CIO.

Many cities that have not given in to demands of public employees have experienced long, costly illegal strikes. When they finally come to terms, public officials have in many cases granted amnesty to employees who participated in illegal strikes against the public.

It is no secret that national leaders of AFSCME want to gain enough power literally to shut down government in order to enforce their demands for salaries, pensions and benefits.

Jerry Wurf, international president, has campaigned for years to have strikes by his union made legal on a national basis.

Since Hawaii enacted a law in 1970 mandating payments by all public employees to the recognized exclusive bargaining representative, other states have enacted "union security clauses."

These are merely "closed shop"

arrangements under which government workers must pay dues, or their equivalent, to whatever union is in power in order to hold political jobs. Such laws are monopolistic.

The effect could be to make unions more influential in appointing public workers than either voters or elected officials.

Compulsory binding arbitration also is advocated by unions in Oklahoma and elsewhere, as a union tool for settling negotiations. In such cases, "outside arbiters" are appointed to decide the issues, assuming authority that rightly is a responsibility of elected officials, who are responsible to voters.

There is good reason for laws prohibiting strikes by public employees against government, but union leaders have told their members they have a right to strike.

If and when government employees become powerful enough to override elected officials in order to dictate pay and other conditions of work, voters will have lost their authority.