

STATEMENT BY THE FEDERAL MEDIATION AND CONCILIATION
SERVICE ON THE NEED FOR CURRENT DATA IN
THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Presented before the Council on Wage and Price Stability
April 30, 1976

The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service appreciates the opportunity to comment on the need for additional impartial data in the public sector. This interest and concern by FMCS is long standing and is expressed on behalf of the collective bargaining practitioners, researchers as well as the mediators who are called upon to resolve the disputes. Our concern can be demonstrated by the fact that FMCS and the Public Employment Relations Research Institute cosponsored the first national conference on Public Sector Labor Relations Research. This conference, the first of its kind, was held in cooperation with other concerned organizations, including the Industrial Relations Research Association, the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution and the Association of Labor Mediation Agencies.

Those attending the June 14-16, 1975, conference were labor and management practitioners, government and private funding agency representatives, federal and state labor relations agency officials, representatives from neutral agencies as well as university scholars and other

impartial individuals. The announced purpose of the conference was to review the state of research in the public sector and to offer recommendations on topics requiring further investigation.

FMCS would like to share with you some of the thinking of the conference. Two formidable limitations on research were cited by the conference, including the shortage of funds to finance projects and equally important, the inadequacy of existing data. Data on all levels, federal, state and local, were thought to be inadequate. Though the conference participants lauded the two primary suppliers of data, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Census for their efforts, they felt these agencies failed to respond more fully to the needs of both the practitioners and academic researchers to promote statistics comparable to that generated from the private sector. Both the completeness and the timeliness of the information were stressed as crucial factors. Unfortunately, the participants felt that both criteria were not currently being met.

Participants discussed the need for a creditable organization to provide the data and rejected universities

and state agencies for various reasons and called upon the federal government through the Bureau of Labor Statistics which has the expertise _____ and acceptability to develop the required data. Before undertaking additional research however, the conference recommended that a thorough user needs study to be undertaken and that the resultant data not be limited by the private sector experience.

Prior to holding the conference, FMCS asked participants to submit a brief pre-meeting paper on the issues they felt required attention as well as the barriers to research and the possible outcome of the sessions. FMCS feels it is appropriate to quote some of the concerns expressed by some of the leading researchers in the field since they personally may not have the opportunity to attend this discussion—hearing.

"Then there is the much debated question of the comparability of salaries, wages, and fringe benefits in the public and private sectors. Are public employees relatively better or worse off than their counterparts in private employment? Do they really have much greater job security? Some useful pioneer work on the first of these questions has been done by the Labor-Management Relations Service, but much more remains to be done.

Quoted a submission "Public Sector Labor Relations Research" by Professor Benjamin Aaron and Archie Kleingartner, University of California.

"Aside from lack of time, money and energy, the most serious problem is lack of data. The public sector data are still deficient to those in the private sector (e.g., no quit rate data for the public sector), although the gap is narrowing.

Quoted from a submission by Professor John F. Burton, Jr., University of Chicago.

"My opinion as to some of the substantive research areas that ought to be explored are:

The structure of wages and salaries. "What is the existing structure of wages and salaries in a governmental jurisdiction? How has the structure changed over time? What are the salary compensation systems in use? How have they changed? How has the distribution of occupations among the different salary setting systems changed over time? Is there a fringe benefit crisis?"

From a submission by Joseph W. Garbarino, Professor of Industrial Relations University of California.

The first and most important barrier, (to research) one that makes impact analysis particularly difficult, is the dreadful state of official data, both longitudinal and cross-sectional, concerning among other things, labor costs and employment.

From a submission by Raymond D. Horton.

"At the data collection end of the scale, one cannot identify with any precision what is going on with respect to one sixth of the work place. At the state level, there is a need for data on comparative wage rates by region for such titles as state police, correction officers, and a whole series of titles what are largely unique to state government. Available professional, scientific, and technical survey data provide a substantial basis for comparison with common private sector titles but not positions upon which the public sector has a near monopoly."

From a submission by Tom Joyner, New York State Public Employment Relations Board.

"Policy issues most important from the standpoint of public management include timely wage, fringe and contract language data by job classes and geography for all levels of government."

From a submission by Steven B. Rynecki.

"The two basic problems are dollars and data...Data on public sector labor relations matters is notoriously incomplete and inexact. Pennsylvania illustrates a case where there is no central agency responsible for collecting information on such matters as strikes, bargaining agreements, and compensation. Data collected by partisan groups, such as the Fraternal Order of Police of International City Managers' Association have also proven of poor quality for research use. Unsound data for course impedes the task of the researcher."

From a submission by Professor J. Joseph Loewenberg, Temple University.

Since FMCS' primary concern is for the peaceful resolution of collective bargaining issues and promoting

labor-management harmony, a pertinent _____ comment on the use of data as an aid in the bargaining process has been presented by Mr. Walt Lambert, Research Director of the International Association of Fire Fighters (AFL-CIO). In a preconference submission, Mr. Lambert states, "Under the present system, the integrity of reporting is threatened and dissimilar statistics from labor and management disrupt negotiations. No central agency is quotable for a realistic approach to resolve the difficulty...Federal statistical agencies rely upon sources that may be questionable or at least biased. Time lags in reports from federal statistical agencies compound the difficulties of up-to-date negotiations. Labor Management relations personnel must face collective bargaining and arbitration with present sources now rather than use reports that are at least two years old." This statement by Mr. Lambert best characterizes the impact on bargaining that the lack of timely and adequate data can and frequently has.

Other researchers into its bargaining process have come to similar conclusions.

Neil W. Chamberlian, Professor of Economics, Yale University and James W. Kuhn, Associate Professor of Industrial Relations, Columbia University in their book,

Collective Bargaining, comment that a factual basis for collective bargaining offers hope for a more smoothly functioning employer union relationship. Studies conducted by one group or the other are not likely to be accepted and the results are suspect, adding another dimension to the conflict.

Timely impartial data is of vital importance to all sectors, but is particularly important in the public sector. Bargaining in most jurisdictions is still relatively new. Union membership in the public sector has grown tremendously since the 1960's and additional states are extending bargaining rights to state and local governments each year. More and more people, both government and union representatives are new to bargaining and it is in these beginning relationships that the availability of information may help ease the stress of negotiations. Equally important in the advancing stages of bargaining is the need for a factual basis for negotiations.

Implicit in the mandate to the Bureau of Labor Statistics to supply such timely data is found in Section 211 (b) of the National Labor Relations Act, "The Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Department of Labor is authorized to furnish upon request to the Service, or employers, employees, or their representatives, all available data

and factual information which may aid in the settlement of any labor dispute, except that no specific information submitted in confidence shall be disclosed."

Drawing from the comments by the distinguished cadre of researchers and experts attending the June 1975 conference, and from the practical day to day experience in collective bargaining of its mediators, FMCS urges that appropriate steps be taken to provide a comprehensive data base by an impartial agency for use by Public Sector bargaining practitioners.