

An Interview with

JOHN FEWKES

In Ormond by the Sea, Florida

July 30, 1986

This interview by Renee Epstein is part of an oral history project contracted by the American Federation of Teachers.

I am John Madison Fewkes born February 19, 1901 in Loma, Colorado. My father was Dr. John M. Fewkes, who graduated from Louisville, Kentucky Medical School in 1895 married my mother Alma Lydia Luck that same year and moved to Loma. My fathers people came over to the United States of America in early 1800's and homesteaded in Waubash County, Illinois and, of course, were farmers. My father sold his share of the homestead in order to attend the Louisville, Kentucky Medical School.

My mother Alma Lydia Luck's people came over to the United States of America sometime close to the Revolutionary War. They became very enamored with the fourth president of the United States James Madison which accounts for the fact that my grandfather was named James Madison Luck and I have as my second name, Madison. My grandfather James Madison Luck was a preacher

and a carpenter and I think that had a great bearing on my mothers life who was a lifelong student of the Bible. Just before she died of cancer she had finished reading the Bible from the first words in Genesis to the last Amen in Revelations seven times. My mother, of course, had a great influence on my life. When I was twelve years of age I made my confession and became a member of the christian church, Disciples of Christ which I followed throughout my life.

I have four prized possessions. One of which is a Bible which my mother wore out during her life. The second is a Bible that she gave me when I was teaching a young men's class. Third was a Bible that was given to me by the past presidents of the Parent Teachers Association of Chicago, four of whom signed that Bible and which I prize greatly. The last one of which is from the Protestant Church Men's Federation in the city of Chicago which they gave to me as the Layman of the Year. So actually all of my life, I have followed the precepts of the christian church, believed in prayer and it has been a part of my existence.

My father Dr. Fewkes was a lifelong democrat and interested in human rights and the welfare of his fellowmen. This was instilled in me in my early life but insofar as unionism was concerned that did not come into my knowledge or understanding until much later when the teachers of Chicago had grave difficulties. My father was as I indicated, a lifelong democrat and a very social person. He, in fact, built the first tennis court in Loma, Colorado. I can remember when I was five years old that he and Judge Gridale

and the pharmacist and a butcher used to play doubles tennis on that court right across the street from our home. Also during this time, of course, my mother was very active in the church and this meant that my sister and I came up in a family that was purely democratic and interested in the welfare of all citizens of that small town.

Largely the city of Loma was interested in agricultural activities. The farmers came in on Saturdays of course and everybody socialized. The main product at that time was sugar beets and that was quite an industry there at that time but as far as unions are concerned so far as I know there were none. My father returned to Louisville, Kentucky to be a professor of Obstetrics at the Louisville Medical School which he didn't care too much for and wanted to return to general practice.

We moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas where I attended school from the time that I was in the first grade until halfway through my junior high school. Of course, Hot Springs had segregated schools and I remember very clearly one time one of the colored men was hung and riddled with bullets and later it was found that he had not committed the crime which he was accused of that was the beginning of my feeling in regard to human rights.

I graduated from high school in Alva, Oklahoma in 1918 just at the end of World War I when my father returned from the medical core of the United States Army. I graduated from high school, my sister graduated from the Northwestern State Teachers College in Alva. The family then went back to Hot Springs, Arkansas but I went on to Chicago to attend the American College

of Physical Education from which I graduated in 1921 and immediately took the examination and was assigned as a physical ed teacher in the elementary schools of Chicago. In 1925 I took the examination for General Certificate for High Schools passed it and was assigned to Tilden Technical High School where we had six thousand boys in attendance at that time.

I enjoyed my teaching very, very much and had a wonderful rapport with my students who came from the the whole South Side of the city of Chicago of their own volition. We used to be asked - the building was at 48th & Union near the Stock Yards which was pretty rough country at that time - "Oh, you must have some terribly tough kids in that school? "Not true. They were fine young men that were coming there in order to try to learn a trade and to be self-supporting, they were fine young men."

As time went on the teachers in the city of Chicago had more and more problems develop. Including the fact that during 1918 and 1919 the Federation of Teachers with Margaret Haley as their business agent, joined with other civic organizations to secure a real assessment of real estate property in order to get more funds for the public schools. Unfortunately, the politicians took two years to perform that assessment and when they sent out the bills there was an immediate tax strike. This meant that teachers in the city of Chicago went for eighteen months with no pay except some pieces of script and a few tax warrants which they had to discount to seventy cents on the dollar.

One day the Men Teachers, the physical ed teachers conducted a track meet for high school youth and after the track meet was over these unpaid men

got together in a gripe session. At that session, it was determined that the next Monday we were going to go to the City Hall and to the Mayor's office. There was quite a large gathering of teachers on the fifth floor of the City Hall and we tried to see the Mayor. Unfortunately, this was just at the time when Mayor Surmack was assassinated in Miami, Florida and the City Council had appointed an interim Mayor named Core. Mr. Core just absolutely refused to come out of his office. He was scared to death so we left word that we would be back the next Monday afternoon after school.

We came back the next Monday afternoon after school and Mayor Kelly who had been elected by the City Council stood on one of the desks and I stood on another to talk. The teachers this time had filled the City Hall all the way from the first floor to the fifth floor which stopped two big banks of elevators from operating and there was no business being conducted in the City Hall. Mayor Kelly told us that there just simply was nothing at the moment that he could do in regard to the matter and that if we blocked the City Hall again like that he would have the teachers jailed. So the Volunteer Emergency Committee which was formed that day on the fifth floor of the City Hall and I was designated as the head of the Volunteer Emergency Committee and was authorized to establish a small committee to direct the activities of the Volunteer Emergency Committee.

I elected two of my own fellow teachers at Tilden Technical High School and one from Inglewood High School so we could get together quickly. We did

this and we sent out word to the teachers that we were to all meet the following Saturday in Liberty Square. Liberty Square was Grant Park at Michigan & Congress. We met there. We formed a parade and went through the streets of Chicago going north on State Street to Wacker Drive across to La Salle and started down La Salle Street. Just as we passed the Board of Education building Arthur Fitzgerald came running up to me and told me that Jimmy Mead, an officer of the Chicago Teachers Union who had been making some very fiery speeches on WCFL, the Chicago Federation of Labor's radio station was about to be fired in the President of the Board of Education's office. I turned the parade around, we went up the big marble stairway in the Board of Education and to the president's office. They had been watching, of course, out of the windows at our parade and when it turned in, they locked the doors and turned off the lights.

We went to the outer door of the presidents office. I lifted up one of my fellow teachers in Tilden Technical High School on my shoulders and he looked through the transom above the plate glass door and said, "They are in there I can them moving around." And as I let him down off my shoulder his foot slipped and went right through that plate glass door. So I reached in on the inside and opened the door and we went to the reception window and door and I put my hand around through the window to open that inner door. I turned then and called for twenty of our Law and Order Committee that all wore blue shirts to follow me and the rest of them to go in the Board of Education rooms which they did.

We filed back into the presidents office and the twenty blue shirts lined the wall in the presidents office. I then said to the president, "We understand that Jimmy Mead is about to be fired for his radio speeches." "Oh no," says the president. "Isn't that right Mr. Mead?" And Mr. Mead who had his back to the president by this time in his chair said, "Oh no," but at the same time he was winking his eye violently at me. Mr. Mead had been castigating the Board of Education for their lack of activity to increase teachers pay and working conditions.

I at that time had just joined the Men Teachers Union and was rather an inactive member of the union. When we had these parades and so forth that of course kind of put me in the eyes of the Men Teachers Union. They had a very grave problem because the Volunteer Emergency Committee's Law and Order Committee of three hundred men wore blue shirts. The man Thomas J. Farrell that I had designated to head the Law and Order committee and organize it then later tried to organize the men in a group that he called the Subscribers or Blue Stars. He was trying to compel the men to join the Subscribers or Blue Stars. Roy Vestel, the president of the Men Teachers Union and Richard Dix one of my fellow teachers at Tilden High School in charge of the aeronautics were taken out of their classrooms and slugged by two young men who told them that they better belong to the Subscribers or Blue Stars of else.

The speeches of Jimmy Mead on WCFL were what caused me to join the Men Teachers Union. I had no contact with unions up until that date but as time went on, I became fully conscious that the American Federation of Labor was

the best friend that the public schools of the United States of America had. Therefore, I felt that we needed more contact with the American Federation of Labor, the Illinois State Federation of Labor and the Chicago Federation of Labor. The American Federation of Labor came out strongly in support of Federal Aid to Education through the public schools and they were responsible largely for the fact that Federal Aid was improved for the public schools.

At this time of course, the Teachers Federation in the city of Chicago was the largest teachers organization. They had withdrawn from labor back in 1917 when they had a case where the Board of Education fired sixty-eight teachers for belonging to the union and they never rejoined. Now this to me seemed to be absolutely terrible and I looked forward to the opportunity of getting back into affiliation with organized labor. By this time in 1934 or 35 we had the Men Teachers Union, the Federation of Women High School Teachers, the Elementary Teachers Union and the Playground Teachers that all belonged to the American Federation of Teachers and therefore were labor organizations. I can tell you that Margaret Haley and her Teachers Federation used to just say that it was so unprofessional for teachers to belong to a labor organization.

During the court case which by the way Margaret Haley and the Teachers Federation then Local #1 of the American Federation of Teachers left labor has never been understandable to me. John Fitzpatrick, then the president of the Chicago Federation of Labor gave Margaret Haley and the Federation

full support in that court case including hiring attorneys and putting all of the pressure that labor could possibly put on to win that case which did happen. They did win the case. The teachers were restored to their jobs and given full back pay but nevertheless the next year Margaret Haley dropped out which was never understandable to me. Now when we come to the situation where the Men Teachers Union is fighting strongly and courageously for teachers I felt that my place belonged in the teachers union. So as the volunteer emergency committee disbanded, we published a pamphlet which we sent to every teacher in the city of Chicago urging one all inclusive teachers organization for Chicago. We subsequently had a meeting in the old Auditorium Theater with some 3,000 teachers present where we considered three plans that were offered for the organization of an all inclusive teachers group.

The one that was offered by the Volunteer Emergency won by a large majority and the Federation and Margaret Haley were given the authority and the duty of putting the plan into effect. Margaret and the Federation sat on the plan and refused to move. Then we come to the place where Thomas J. Farrell and the Blue Stars Blue Stripes are going to try to take over the Men Teachers Union. Tom Farrell with his Blue Stars Subscribers organization was attempting to abolish in fact the Men Teachers Union. When he found that this was impossible and his organization was beginning to lose membership, he then determined that he was going to take over the Men Teachers Union then he

was going to run for president. Then officers of the Men Teachers Union came to me and asked me to run for president against Tom Farrell which I did. In a counting of the ballots we had six policemen from the police force of the city of Chicago, one at each desk where ballots were counted. I defeated Mr. Farrell very badly and took over the Men Teachers Union with the one understanding that the big project of the Men Teachers Union was going to be the amalgamation of the four then existing teachers unions into the Chicago Teachers Union.

As I have previously stated the Volunteer Emergency put out a pamphlet urging a one all inclusive Chicago teachers group. When I became president of the teachers union this gave me an opportunity to talk with the other teachers unions which I did religiously. Within one year's time, we did go to the American Federation of Teachers and agree to submit our Charters and to receive a Charter of the Chicago Teachers Union which we did at the Chicago Civic Opera House. With a packed house, we received from Irving R. Kingsley, Secretary-Treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers at that time, the old Charter Number One for the Chicago Teachers Union.

The organization of the Chicago Teachers Union affected a number of different things. One being it stopped the internecine war between the Men Teachers Union and the Federation of the Women's High School Teachers Union which had learned to love each other bitterly. Then also you had the situation where High School teachers were in conflict with the Elementary

teachers and affecting the organization of the Chicago Teachers Union. We gradually ironed out these antipathies between the Men and the Women and the High School and Elementary School teachers. In fact, one of the prime reasons why these things were accomplished was the fact that one of the first things that we accomplished with the Chicago Teachers Union was a single salary schedule.

The single salary schedule was based on educational background and years of service rather than whether they were a high school or an elementary teacher and this, of course, eliminated a lot of problems between teachers. The single salary schedule was secured in bitter battles with the Board of Education sometime between 1937 and 1941. The Men and Women actually got together a little before the Elementary and High School teachers stopped their internecine war but the two were effectively brought up together by the Chicago Teachers Union.

The Chicago Teachers Union through the House of Representatives which was our lawmaking controlling body of the organization had many battles that finally brought the Men and Women and the Elementary and High School Teachers together in one all inclusive organization. Now this of course was not accomplished by any person, it was the will of the majority of the Chicago teachers. In the Chicago Teachers Union, we had men and women who were loyal, dedicated, intelligent and willing to give of their time and energy to the ongoing of the union. Some forty odd teachers met in the executive board almost every Monday in the year. Then of course, we had approximately eleven

standing committees I think all of which had wonderful chairmen and members of the committee and they brought in suggestions in regard to program and policies for the union. Then we had our House of Representatives that was an organization of over four hundred members of whom over two hundred were absolutely dedicated people who came to all of the monthly meetings and helped tremendously in the ongoing of the Chicago Teachers Union. Of course, the general memberships loyalty was a tremendous factor.

Now the Chicago Teachers Union was the product of organizational efforts that were carried on by largely the delegates. The union had a delegate in each of the schools and I had a monthly meeting of those delegates in which I urged them toward organization in their schools. We sent out officers from the union to the schools almost a weekly occurrence and gradually we overcame the Federation and Margaret Haley's ^{dictum} ~~dictum~~ that no one who was a professional should belong to a labor union. Gradually we established the fact that the Chicago Teachers Union was a highly professional organization which was interested in promoting the education of the students in our classrooms just as much as we were interested in improving our salaries, pensions and working conditions.

The union established of course an education committee which had as its primary concern improving education of the students in our classrooms. We also held frequent conferences on education and in one of those conferences

particularly, I remember we had Adeli E. Stevenson II, Governor the State of Illinois as one of the speakers, Mayor Martin J. Kennely as one of the speakers and Harold C. Hunt as one of the speakers. Our constant emphasis on education also helped in that principals became aware of the fact that they had a duty to support teachers in problems of discipline for instance and this was the accomplishment of the union. We put the pressure on the principals to see that they did support teachers in problems of discipline and also attempted to promote a morale in each school where teachers and principals were working together for the education of the children.

The Chicago Teachers Union had a program which we placed before the Board of Education, the general Superintendent of Schools and which we continue to apply the pressure to have put into effect. Then we also were very active with the City Council in regard to funds for public education. We went to the State Legislature with a very large program of legislation and we of course in the process of legislation also approached the Governor of the State of Illinois and we secured his assistance in many instances for our legislative program. Also, I must give great credit to Rubin Sodastrum, President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor who had become a very powerful influence in the State Legislature which trusted Rubin Sodastrum from end to end. They knew that he was going to tell them the truth and nothing but the truth and also that he had a tremendous voting influence that the legislators were very well aware of.

Early on in the life of the organization of course, we had representing the Chicago Federation of Labor John Fitzpatrick. I used to be in his office very frequently to get his advice and counsel as to how to proceed to make the Chicago Teachers Union effective. Then Rubin Sodastrum at the state level as I have indicated was just a very powerful friend insofar as our legislative efforts were concerned.

In the early days of the Chicago Teachers Union, Helen Taggart was vice-president of the Chicago Teachers Union. She was a marvelous mathematician and she knew the board of education's budget as well as the comptroller of the board of education. In one instance we threatened to strike because Helen Taggart had found one million dollars that either by mistake or intent had been buried in the board of education's budget and was available for teachers salary increases. Helen Taggart and I went down to visit Governor Henry Horner and showed him exactly where the million dollars was after that Governor Horner called Helen Taggart his million dollar baby. And at one time when we visited him, he insisted that his limousine and his driver take us to New Salem which was a little replica you know of the Abraham Lincoln cabin and so forth a few miles from Springfield, Illinois. We visited New Salem in the governor's limousine.

During this time we also had the pressure of Victor A. Olander, who was secretary-treasurer of the Illinois State Federation of Labor and whose office was in Chicago. He was very helpful and effective in all of our activities at the Board of Education and the City Council. Because of the

influence of the Governor and Victor Orlander, the one million dollars was given to the teachers in salary increases. Therefore, it was not necessary for us to strike which we would have done had not the board of education given the teachers that million dollars in salary increase.

Personally, I am very happy that during my twenty-three years as president of the Chicago Teachers Union it was never necessary to strike. We had a second situation in 1947 I believe where the city council of Chicago refused to spread the levy for the board of education's budget which the city council had to do because the board of education was appointed and therefore could not levy taxes. The city council had refused to spread the levy unless the board of education gave each member of the city council thirty patronage jobs in the board of education which Harold C. Hunt, general superintendent and the board of education refused to do. Therefore the Chicago Teachers Union had a meeting on a Saturday and finally decided that we would strike on Tuesday unless the city council spread the levy on Monday.

I so notified the Mayor, who was the chairman of the city council of course and several members in the city council that the teachers were going to go out on strike Tuesday morning unless the city council spread that levy on Monday. The city council did spread the levy on Monday and it was not necessary for the teachers to strike. Those were the only two times during my twenty-three years when we and the teachers union felt that there was any need for a strike. We had knowledge of the board of education's budget and

knew just exactly how much money was available and when it was possible to do so get our teacher increases. Fortunately Harold C. Hunt, Superintendent of Schools and Sergeant Schriver, who was President of the Board of Education both were very favorable to teachers. Then following them Benjamin C. Willis, Superintendent of Schools and President of the Board of Education Frank Wiston were rather favorable to teachers also. Frank Wiston, the President of the Board of Education was the manager of about six large buildings in the Loop in Chicago and was thoroughly familiar with the Carpenters Union, the Plumbers Union, the Janitors Union and so forth. He knew unionism from a to z and when we went to Frank Wiston for something that the union wanted, we usually had a friend in court there too.

During the days of the Volunteer Emergency Committee, the question of strike of course was very prevalent because of going eighteen months without pay, but it was decided by the teachers that they would not go on strike. In fact they were urged to go on strike by the Mayor and others who hoped by their going on strike the board of education could then not pay them and save money. So the teachers decided that they would not go on strike because the board of education and the Mayor wanted them to do so and so striking so far as the Chicago Teachers Union there for money, a long day was something that was to be avoided if at all humanly possible.

During the two times that the Chicago Teachers Union threatened to strike during the time that I was president, in both instances the board of education or the city council was ~~patently~~ acting illegally or through

patently

mistake. So I and all the members of the union were adamant in the fact that unless the board of education exceeded to the request, unless the city council spread the level that we would strike. I don't think it entered our minds to think about whether we might be jailed or have legal action against us or not. We just felt that it was absolutely imperative that our demands be met and so we voted to strike and were all prepared to do it. I do not believe that the Chicago teachers really considered what the board of education might do if they did go on strike. I don't think that there was any fear on their part that the board of education for instance would fire them. I don't think that this just entered our minds.

When we threatened to strike the first time the Chicago Teachers Union had about 8,000 members which was about one-half the teaching force at that time. The second time that we threatened to strike the union had about 18,000 teachers out of some 22,000 total teaching force. In both instances we had a very large percentage of the teachers who had voted to go on strike and who probably would take the other teachers along with them. In both of the instances when the Chicago Teachers Union threatened to strike, I believe that the public would have been completely behind us. Not only the labor movement which of course would have given us all of their help and support financially, politically and every other way, but I think that the public itself was very much behind the Chicago Teachers Union.

The Chicago Teachers Union's highly professional activities and the press have given us pretty good support. I am sure that the public would have supported the Chicago Teachers Union in our strikes in spite of the fact that we would be putting their children on the streets. I think this was just completely due to the position of the Chicago Teachers Union in the public eye, in the press and in all government officials. The Chicago Teachers Union established the finest of relations with the media. The press and later along television were very welcome at most of the teachers activities and meetings. The reporters had access to the Chicago Teachers Union office of course at all times and we established the best of relations with the reporters from the Tribune, the Daily News and the Hurst Newspapers. Later along when television came along, the reporters from television would frequently come to the union and record interviews with the officers and so our relationships with press and television was just excellent.

When I became president of the Chicago Teachers Union, Local #1 at its inception in October 1937, I realized that I had a lot to learn not only about unionism but also about organization and administration. I therefore went to the University of Chicago and took two courses under Paul Douglas who became a very dear friend and later was elected Alderman and then Senator for the United States of America where he and Hubert Humphrey from Minnesota originated wonderful legislation for this nation. Also I took a course under Floyd Reeves, who was head of the Tennessee Valley Authority and quite famous for his work there on organization. This helped materially in establishing

the Constitution of the Chicago Teachers Union and Bylaws and helped me in my administration of the organization. From these courses at the University of Chicago with Paul Douglas and Floyd Reeves I, of course learned a great deal about unions and union activity and direction. Of course my years of struggle with the voluntary emergency committee and teacher problems had developed in me the ambition and the hope that there might be established in the city of Chicago, an all inclusive teachers organization that would be powerful enough to help the city of Chicago in its plannings and hopes and aspirations as well as the educational system in Chicago. We of course in order to do that are going to have to influence politicians, legislators and the general public as well as the media and television. Therefore we had to organize a program of caring and publicity to all of these various sources and agencies and this I think was one of the things that the Chicago Teachers Union did well.

The Chicago Teachers Union was espousing the cost of democracy and liberalism and anti-communism to the anth degree. When we were working with the volunteer emergency committee, the four of us drove all night to Washington to try to obtain the help of President Roosevelt with our troubles in Chicago. President Roosevelt was not able to see us and gave us a very good excuse which I can't remember now but he did have Vice President John Garner and Jesse Jones, head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation meet with us. We talked with those two gentlemen and were told that it was just simply impossible for the RFC to loan money to the city of Chicago's Board of Education even if they did mortgage their income bearing property.

We came back to Chicago. There with the help of General Charles Gates Dawes, former Vice President of the United States of America by the way, as well as president of the Northern Trust Company Bank, we sent a man to Washington, D.C. to introduce legislation in the Congress of the United States of America that would allow the RFC to loan money to Chicago if they did mortgage their Loop property. We had the help of President Roosevelt as President of the United States and Charles Gates Dawes, who was a Republican by the way and former Vice President under Calvin Coolidge, helped in getting this legislation developed, introduced and passed in record breaking time. The RFC then guaranteed the loan and the banks in the city of Chicago, the five Loop banks gobbled up those loans immediately then and we got \$22 million dollars for back pay of the Chicago teachers.

This all occurred in 1930. This all led up to the establishment of the Chicago Teachers Union because it was perfectly evident to the teachers of Chicago that we had to have powerful influences in the city, state and nation. The only way that this could be accomplished was the united action on the part of Chicago teachers. The Chicago Teachers Union was instrumental in the election of Paul Douglas as alderman of the city of Chicago and later as Senator of the United States of America, where he made such a remarkable contribution to the welfare of our nation. And, of course, Paul Douglas was actually a member of the Chicago Teachers Union. We used to send him a membership card which he carried in his wallet all the time that he was Senator of the United States.

Then we were very active in the campaign for the election of Adeli Stevenson as Governor of the State of Illinois. It was at one of the educational meetings of the Chicago Teachers Union where Adeli Stevenson spoke as Governor that I made the statement that he should be President of the United States which was picked up by the newspapers and started the campaign for Adeli Stevenson as President of the United States of America. It is vital that unions do have political activity and understanding and it is very wonderful for unions to have governmental officials who are interested in labor unions and who support them and look to them for support.

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JOHN FEWKES INTERVIEW

July 30, 1986

Tape 2

One of the things that interested me most in trying to develop the Constitution and Bylaws of the Chicago Teachers Union was to assure that democracy would continue to exist in the union and that the general membership would always have complete and absolute final control. We developed a constitution and bylaws that would assure the perpetuation of a democratic liberal union. The constitution and bylaws provide that individuals can secure petitions for election of officers and there can always be an opportunity for any group to gather itself together and develop a list of candidates and a program that they feel the organization should adopt.

In the Chicago Teachers Union from the very beginning, we always had various parties or caucuses that attempted to put forth our programs. The party caucus that I was a party of remained, of course, the dominant one during the first four years of the Chicago Teachers Union and has thereafter. There is always with few exceptions been opposition candidates and lists of candidates within the Chicago Teachers Union. I believe that once Robert Healey was unopposed and I believe that Jacqueline Vaughn has just been unopposed for reelection but this is very unusual within the

Chicago Teachers Union. I do not believe that during the first four years of the Chicago Teachers Union that there was any political constitution to the various caucuses or parties. With the single exception that there has always been a communist cell within the Chicago Teachers Union but it never had any influence to speak of and has just been a sort of loyal opposition. I do not believe that the political parties within the Chicago Teachers Union at the outset at least were based on political philosophy. I think that actually the groups were confined to personalities and the support of certain individuals rather than any political philosophy whatever.

Well during the first four years of the unions existence, I don't think there was any great difference in political philosophies or anything of that kind. I think that the antipathies that had been built up between the Men Teachers Union and the Federation of Women High School Teachers still carried over. It was a problem for the union at the outset but days in the Executive Board together and in the House of Representatives together gradually obliterated those antipathies between the Men and the Women. Then the Elementary and High School situation also was another thing that gradually was diminished and was pretty much completely dissolved when we put through the single salary schedule. In putting that single salary schedule in effect this was where the Elementary and High School teachers finally got together.

I think the Chicago Teachers Union had a rather unique background in that they had developed great confidence and trust in certain individuals during

the days of the Volunteer Emergency Committee. That trust carried over into the Chicago Teachers Union itself and actually was very much responsible for the amalgamation of the four teacher unions into the all inclusive Chicago Teachers Union.

The plight of the Chicago teachers was so terrible there in 1930. One of the teachers at Lynn Boome High School went into the basement of his new home which he was just buying and was losing because of failure to make payments, and blew his brains out. Teachers were losing their insurance had borrowed on it up to the hilt. They had like I, myself borrowed from three different loan companies, \$300 from each one and was paying 33 1/3% interest on that money. We were frantic. The teachers of Chicago were desperate. They were ready to band together and take action and they did not fear whatever consequences might come losing their jobs or anything else. They were just ready for action and so they became involved in the Volunteer Emergency Committee. Finding out what unified action could really do by that source, they then transferred their thoughts to the organizations in which they belonged at that time and affected the amalgamation and the organization of the Chicago Teachers Union.

Early in my presidency of the Chicago Teachers Union, I became aware that we had a communist cell at work in the organization trying to influence and dominate its policies and eventually take over the organization. They used to meet at the Central YMCA. I had a very fine friend who was the secretary of the Central YMCA and having talked to him, he let me know every time they

took a room in the Central YMCA to hold a meeting. I would send individuals from the organization over there, different ones all the time, to see just who they were trying to recruit for the communist cell. Those people would immediately be contacted and told what they were liable to get into, so they were never very effective. We had them very well under control and knew what they were doing all the time. Of course, the FBI was over asking about them and would absolutely never give us any information of course.

As president of the Men Teachers Union, I attended the convention of the American Federation of Teachers. I was horrified and shocked to find that the communists of the American Federation of Teachers had dominated and taken over the Executive Council. The communists had elected Jerome Davis, whom I have always felt was a fellow traveler himself and elected him as president of the American Federation of Teachers. This, of course, really shocked me. Then as president of the Chicago Teachers Union the amalgamated organization, when I went to the next convention I found that there was quite a considerable party or caucus that was working against the communists. People from the New England states, from the Southern states and Chicago, of course, came along and gave that group a terrific boost.

Now as we approach that convention on the first morning of the convention I met with Dr. George Counts for breakfast and talked with him. I had been informed by some of the other locals that they were very seriously considering running him for president. I found after talking to Dr. Counts that he had really made a study of communism and the communist party of the

United States of America. At the end of that breakfast, I told Dr. Counts that I would bring the Chicago Teachers Union in behind him in his campaign for the presidency and would do everything I could to get all of the locals from Illinois and other places to vote for him too. To make a long story short we elected Dr. George Counts.

When I think one interesting thing that followed was I said to Dr. Counts, "Dr. Counts lets ask some of these people to meet with us and see if we can change their views, political activities and so forth." He says, "Well John, I don't think it will be effective at all but if you want to do it all right." So we invited Bella Dodd from New York, Marygola Grossman from Philadelphia and Dr. Windspere, who was the head of the communist group there at that convention. He was a professor from Wisconsin University. We invited them to come to my suite and they did. At one point in the conversation Bella Dodd interrupted Dr. Windspere and he jumped up from his chair and he shook his finger and blew his nose. Bella was lying on my bed by the way and he said, "Bella Dodd if you interrupt me again, I am going to have you read out of the," and he stopped and I said, "Out of the party." Dr. Counts was right. It evidently didn't do any good although subsequently, Bella Dodd did go back to her Catholic church and membership. She wrote a book in which she squealed on all of her communist party members and so that kind of negated all of the talk that had been directed in my direction as a red-baiter.

Now in that convention, Stanton Smith of Chattanooga and I were elected as floor leaders for the anti-communist caucus or party. I think we did an

excellent job of handling Bella Dodd, Marygola Grossman and Windspere, who were all of them very capable speakers. We were able to show to the delegates of the convention just how they were attempting to handle the American Federation of Teachers and use it as a transmission belt for communism through the American Teacher newspaper. Subsequently of course, we affected a referendum vote of the membership throughout the nation which did throw out and revoke the charters of New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles locals.

Now this, of course, caused a tremendous deficit insofar as our dues were concerned. Occasionally Irving R. Kingsley, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers would call me on the phone and say, "John, I haven't got enough money to pay my staff here in the office is there any possibility that the Chicago local could pay its dues in advance?" I would go to the executive board of the union and we would vote to pay our dues in advance. We would rush a check over to Irving Kingsley so he could pay the staff of the American Federation of Teachers. Of course then, we began to build in the American Federation of Teachers and this unfortunate financial condition gradually disappeared.

The American Federation of Teachers was indeed fortunate in having Dr. George Counts as president during the transition period when the communist influence was eliminated from the American Federation of Teachers. He was not only knowledgeable about communism and the party in the United States of America but he was a very wonderful inspiring man on his own. I had the distinct privilege of driving with him to a number of cities to talk to teachers about membership in the American Federation of Teachers. During

those trips, Dr. Counts loved to sing the old American songs such as "Alvira where is my little brown dog?" and "Go tell Aunt Rodie, Go tell Aunt Rodie her old grey goose is dead, the one she's been saving to make a feather bed" and others that just were beautiful. He and I just had the most wonderful time on those trips. He was indeed an inspiration.

Having Dr. George Counts as president of the AFT was a real boom for the AFT. Dr. Counts was such a fundamental American and so interested in improving education in the United States that he was a very influential and helpful president within the American Federation of Teachers. I don't believe that Dr. Counts was too greatly interested in unionism except that it did have a fundamental Americanism about it being a union and having the members be the controlling body of the organization was fundamental to him. During his presidency, we increased the membership of the American Federation of Teachers remarkably. He went a long way to dispelling the idea that it was unprofessional to belong to a labor union.

I have always just treasured my contacts and memory with George Counts. I think that I fundamentally was more of a trade unionist than Dr. Counts. Evidently my activities within the Chicago Teachers Union and the Illinois State Federation of Labor where I was involved in committee work for the organization particularly I was chairman of the Health and Safety Committee of the Illinois State Federation of Labor and introduced some legislation along those lines. So I guess that I was more personally involved in the labor movement than Dr. Counts ever had the opportunity to be.

The Chicago Teachers Union constitution and bylaws provided at that time that the major officers only succeed themselves once in office which meant two two-year terms or four years. I was ending my second term and Dr. George Counts at that time had informed the American Federation of Teachers that he would not be a candidate for reelection as president. The Chicago Teachers Union asked me to run for the presidency of the American Federation of Teachers and went to the Gary convention and put on a campaign which resulted in my election as president of the American Federation of Teachers.

So being elected in 1941-42 as president of the American Federation of Teachers, I became terrifically interested in trying to promote organization. At that time, the presidency was not a paid office and the presidents continued as George Counts did to be a professional at the University and I as a teacher at Tilden Technical High School. I worked very closely with Irving R. Kingsley, who was then secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers, who was of course a full-time paid officer of the organization.

Irving Kingsley too was vitally interested in organization. He and I visited locals in the South together and other places and tried our best to promote membership in the American Federation of Teachers. That is the way that I found that the locals in the South were segregated. We visited both the white and the black locals and urged them to amalgamate. To join together in order to give them more power, more influence and to follow what we felt was really democratic civil rights possibilities for the South. We

were very disturbed that our suggestions for integration were not followed immediately, in fact, it took so long for these things to occur in the South.

During 1942 financial difficulties of the American Federation of Teachers made it impossible to carry on very much of a program in any field. Of course, we were all anxious to get the New York, the Philadelphia and the Los Angeles locals back into operation and doing as much as we could to stimulate them into reorganization. That eventually did happen and bringing more financial aid to the national so that more programs could be involved. In 1942 there was very little program that could be carried out because of our financial troubles. During the time that I was president of the AFT in 1942, of course, we had a no-strike clause which was still into effect at the time that we threatened to strike twice and actually the Chicago Teachers Union just did not pay any attention to that no-strike clause. We just ignored it and would have actually gone on strike had not our demands been met making it unnecessary for us to strike.

Only later was the American Federation of Teachers strong enough, powerful enough to really give any guidance, direction, supervision to the locals. The locals were actually the foundation stone, the pillars of the American Federation of Teachers and the national organization did not acquire very much power insofar as the locals were concerned until many years later.

I was reelected president of the Chicago Teachers Union in 1947 and continued to be reelected until the time that I retired as a school teacher and as president of the Chicago Teachers Union in 1966. Now during that period of time, we had in the American Federation of Teachers Carl Megel from the Chicago local as president for twelve years and Charles Cogen as president from the New York local.

Carl Megel was very active in the Chicago Teachers Union. In fact I brought him down to the Chicago Teachers Union as assistant to the president, myself and then reelected him as vice-president of the local because of his wonderful service as my assistant. When it came time to run Carl for the president of the American Federation of Teachers, he had an excellent background in unionism. He was a good strong labor man and Carl had as one of his prime objectives as president of the AFT, the increase of membership. He put on an organization campaign that was just excellent and which was effective in increasing the membership of the union.

During the period in which communism was a terrific issue within the United States of America, we had McCarthyism and all of that sort of thing. The American Federation of Teachers took action that they would not support any teacher who was declared to be a communist and also that they would actually blacklist any teacher who was convicted of being a communist. As far as I am concerned, I am very much for both of those provisions and assisted in putting them through the American Federation of Teachers. As far as I am concerned, I do not feel that a member of the communist party can in

good faith teach our children here in the United States democracy and civil rights as we view them since communism is a totalitarian philosophy which does not countenance any other type of political activity. I personally believe that communists are detrimental to trade unions in the first place. Secondly, that the educational system in the United States of America which is for the purpose of educating individuals to existence in a democracy cannot possibly tolerate communists teaching in the schools.

During Mr. Megel's presidency in the American Federation of Teachers he actively supported the idea of collective bargaining. Within the Chicago Teachers Union, we too were fighting to try to get contracts with the Board of Education. In fact, we in Chicago affected a written agreement with the Board of Education which Benjamin C. Willis and I signed which in effect was a collective bargaining contract. It did not specifically identify itself as such which was very hard for some of our members to agree to and put up with, but it was a first step toward collective bargaining. We did then finally affect by having an election within the Chicago Teachers Union which the Chicago teachers won to become the sole collective bargaining agent for teachers in Chicago.

Now that was the death now to the Federation of Teachers and Margaret Haley's organization in Chicago, after that they quickly disintegrated. Finally, two members from the Federation came to my office in the Chicago Teachers Union and presented me with a scrapbook of the Chicago Federation

of Teachers from way back in 1905. That very wonderful historical document has I believe been given to one of the universities in Chicago by the Chicago Teachers Union.

Collective bargaining of course is very important to teachers and the fact that they have one organization which is responsible for their welfare is of prime importance. Membership in such an organization of course becomes almost necessary for a teacher if they want to have any sort of impact upon the activities that are fundamental to their welfare. The fact that the New York local under Charlie Cogen secured collective bargaining was a great boom to the American Federation of Teachers. Other locals throughout the country including Chicago then became involved in securing collective bargaining.

Charlie Cogen then became president of the American Federation of Teachers. He carried collective bargaining into the program and policies of the organization and inspired locals throughout the nation to work toward collective bargaining. Cogen was a very effective, fine, presiding officer at the conventions during the time that he was president. I made the very foolish mistake of running against Charlie Cogen as president of the AFT and was soundly defeated. I couldn't feel very baldy about it because actually I was a supporter of most of Charlie Cogen's program and policies within the AFT.

The fact that the New York City and State combined into one large organization made the New York union the real power within the American Federation of Teachers. The Chicago Teachers Union followed along as the second largest organization but not with the tremendous size of New York. The New York union has therefore largely dominated the American Federation of Teachers through the Progressive Caucus. The National Caucus of which I was a member has never had any opportunity to defeat the New York local. They are just too big and too strong. The power of the New York local, of course, lies in the fact of their numbers, their finances and the leadership that has developed in New York.

The American Federation of Teachers now has grown to a point where it is in real competition with the National Education Association for the primary organization of teachers in the United States of America. The program that is being put on by the American Federation of Teachers insofar as education is concerned and so far as organization is concerned and in promoting the welfare of teachers has really put the NEA in a very poor light. Within the next ten years, its practically inevitable that the American Federation of Teachers is going to be larger than the National Education Association.

With the growth of the American Federation of Teachers increasing all the time, there is the possibility of a merger with the National Education Association. This indeed would be a great day for the teachers in the United States of America if we could have one inclusive organization in the United States. It would be so powerful, so influential that the two organizations

should make every effort to get together and form one all inclusive organization of teachers in the United States just as we have done in the city of Chicago. The establishment of such an organization is inevitable and therefore, the sooner the better.

William Graves of the American Federation of Labor also recognized me as president of the American Federation of Teachers by appointing me as the head of a committee to meet Hubert Humphrey at his hotel and escort him to the podium in the convention hall, which we did. Senator Humphrey made his wonderful speech after which the committee again took him back to his hotel room where we found that he was dripping wet with sweat and had no change of clothing because his baggage had been misplaced somewhere on the trip. So I and one of the other members of the committee went down and bought a shirt, a tie, underwear and socks and brought them back up to the hotel room where Senator Humphrey took a shower bath and put on the dry clothing and was he pleased. He wanted very much to refund the money to my fellow labor delegate but, of course, we refused but this started a personal friendship between Hubert Humphrey and I.

Later of course, Hubert Humphrey and Paul Douglas of Illinois introduced and passed legislation through the Congress of the United States of America. It was some of the finest legislation that has ever been passed by the Congress since the establishment of human rights. One of the two most important pieces of legislation was improvement and federal aid to education

which both senators were very, very much involved in. They believed in education and served the public schools of the United States of America in every way they possibly could.

This is the story of the Charlie Stillman desk recently dedicated in the Executive Council Room of the American Federation of Teachers in their beautiful new office building in Washington, D.C. In 1916 the American Federation of Teachers was organized in the city of Chicago and Charles B. Stillman was elected the first president of the American Federation of Teachers. Mr. Stillman immediately went out purchased the desk put it in his living room which immediately became the office of the American Federation of Teachers, I believe for almost six years.

Now Charles Stillman at the time of the organization of the Chicago Teachers Union was a principal in the Chicago public schools, he also was a member of the Men Teachers Union. When we amalgamated and organized the Chicago Teachers Union, Charles Stillman became the vice president of the Principals Functional Group which then was a very important part of the Chicago Teachers Union. He served therefore on the Executive Board, in the House of Representatives and I want to say that he was one of the best advisors, counselors and helpers the president of the Chicago Teachers Union could ever have. He had a facility of smoothing the troubled waters when some of the groups got into violent arguments within the Executive Board also in the House of Representatives of which he was also a member being a member of the Executive Board.

Now Charlie Stillman unfortunately had cancer of the throat and he died a very very painful death. Upon his death his wife called me at the Chicago Teachers Union office and asked me if I would care to have Charlie Stillman's desk, the original desk and I said, "I would be so happy to do so." So she sent me the desk which I took to my home in Tenley Park when I retired as president of the Chicago Teachers Union. I kept it there until we moved to Florida and brought it down with me to Florida. It remained there until the time when I went to Chicago to attend the banquet honoring Bob Healey for his long years of service as president of the Chicago Teachers Union. There I met the secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers Robert Porter.

I told Bob Porter about the desk and I said, "Do you think that the American Federation of Teachers would like to have that desk?" "Oh!" he says, "I am sure they would." Consequently, he sent a big furniture truck picked up the desk had it taken to Washington, D.C. where he had it refurbished. So recently it was dedicated in the executive board room of the American Federation of Teachers. I guess that I will have to confess that my wife wasn't as enthusiastic about that old desk as I was. In fact, she at one time moved it from our Florida room right out to the entrance of the garage. The next place was going to be out for the garbage truck. And so I

took it into our bedroom and stuck it over against the wall and protected it with my life. So finally, Bob was good enough to rescue the desk and take it to Washington. My wife then bought me a beautiful desk which I am at a total loss to use. There are just too darn many drawers in it.

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