

An Interview with

CATHERINE MCGOURTY

In Chicago

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

My father was employed over forty years at the Peoples Gas Company. When I was young and knew what it was, I remember him coming home from work and telling some hard stories about people and unions. I am sure he didn't belong to one may be because of his position, he was the superintendent of a plant but very sympathetic to labor.

My father was born in Joilet, Illinois moved up into the Chicago area. They were farm people. His father was a railroad man. They were Irish. He married my mother and he was really quite a bachelor before they were married. My mother was born in Ireland and we were all just working class people. We had a comfortable home. He was years older than my mother so he had a start to provide that kind of a home.

When I was ready to go to work it was Depression years and things were very very tough in Chicago. I applied for a position through the Sinsler Agency. It was one of the better agencies. I had completed an advanced business course after high school. I was one girl with four brothers. They were having a tougher time than I was having getting a job. I was snooty about it and came home and paid one week's salary for this position, \$15.00 a week.

The day I applied there were meetings going on. Teachers were in and out. They just sat me down at a desk and gave me something to do. I really didn't know I was employed until toward the end of the week when they asked me the spelling of my name and more details. It might be interesting to describe the physical appearance of the office. On the glass door entering the office there was a list of the unions that were occupying the office: the Federation of Women High School Teachers, Local 3; the Federation of Men Teachers, Local 2; the Elementary Teachers, Local 199; the Playground Instructors and the Truant Officers. The door could hardly hold all the names, of course, the American Federation of Teachers was listed at the top.

In the course of the day especially after three o'clock, the traffic became heavy, some of the members would come into the office. They were on a volunteer basis but it was very exciting because you could hardly do any more work. They were all vivacious, interesting and some strange people. I am sure it was one of the things that interested me in the AFT.

When I came home to report about my days work my father would smile. Then he would smile to my mother and he said, "Sounds like she is in a safe place." Then he related what he knew about Margaret Haley who formed the AFT in Chicago. As I think now, I wonder what his reaction would be and wonder how he would accept all the women's lib? I think he had the feeling that here I was working in a place that was not safe. He loved to ask me questions and relate what happened during the day. Then he would often relate about his own position and the greatness of a union.

My families reaction to my position with the AFT was with mixed emotion. My brothers would tease me and want me to get off the subject when I came home in the evening. My father would always be interested, my mother was interested but I soon found out the rest of them did not want to hear what happened all day. They were all interested in their own field and they tolerated me I am sure, but it wasn't what they were doing this was 1930.

The desk I sat at was set up with three drawers on one side and a manual Underwood typewriter. The wall I faced had a picture of a Japanese lady of quality. In the back of me was a huge clock. There was also one chair for visitors, it must have been a discarded chair from someone's dining room set, it had arms. There was a strip of carpet, another small picture of the convention held in Milwaukee and it showed the sign, it was a glossy print. The picture was perhaps of the City Hall.

There was an entrance to a large workroom with large worktables. This was a place where representatives from all of these locals listed on the door

came in the afternoon. As far as I recall each local did not have an individual office, they used the national office for their small committee meetings. I think they went over to the city CO-OP for their membership meetings that was located a few blocks away.

The secretary-treasurer of the AFT at that time was the only salaried officer. The presidency was an honorary position. The presidents in sequence the way I remember would be Dr. Henry R. Linville, he lived in New York. He was the president when Mrs. Hanson was the secretary-treasurer. Mrs. Hanson was a teacher from Hyde Park High School but originally from Olean, New York. Enough about the physical aspect of the office it wasn't much but it was very active.

There was a water-cooler in the large room, the workroom mailings were done in the workroom. The American Teacher was mailed. The wrappers were addressed on an Elliot machine, hand addressed through this machine and then sent to the printer for mailing. It was a great advantage for a beginning person out of school to work at the AFT. Mrs. Hanson was a very brilliant woman. Her dictation had a wonderful rhythm. I had good experience in shorthand from the very beginning, these visitations of people after school they would love to dictate a letter to me.

Dr. Maynard Krieger from the University of Chicago was one that came in, he was interested in organizing the professors at the University of Chicago. I was frightened a bit to take his dictation. First of all, I think he was

flirting with me. I was sure of the rest, but here was a stranger and perhaps because he was a professor, my fingers were stiff. I had the reality to say, "I will give you a rough draft," I made very few errors. He kept coming in and would always say, "Ask Catherine to save a little time." I would never forget his dictation and I could do it so well. I was so delighted because I began to know the routine of the rest but it was a great experience to work with all these people.

I shared the work assignments with Lina Holtz. I had to do a great deal of routine things but mostly to assist with that assignment. My first assignments were always the dictation, the correspondence. When Lina went on vacation I was well trained to take her place for a few weeks. I would make the deposits of the per capita that came to the office, walk to the bank with the deposit daily. Of course when the convention was scheduled that was another area of work that was entirely different. Lina needed me and I stayed with her at the hotel.

The first convention I attended was at the Morrison Hotel. It was the year of the World's Fair. AFT was always very budget minded there was not much money to spend and the staff would occupy the rooms that were gratis. They had the suite at the top floor of the Morrison Hotel. It was exciting to look out and see the World's Fair from the windows of that hotel.

It was the first convention and it was exciting to see and meet Dr. Linville and Selma Borchard, a very colorful person from Washington, she was

the legislative representative. The first time I saw her she was draped on a couch with an armful of long stemmed red roses. She had beautiful brown eyes, long black hair, wore white most of the time and, of course, a hat. In regard to Selma Borchard, she too was always on a voluntary basis. Naturally legislative matters were things that would happen at the moment. We would often get, the late part of the day, a special delivery letter from 1741 Park Road, N.W. and would groan because it would have to be sent out immediately. It was often written in pencil from Washington, D.C. and it was whatever action was happening and it was her newsletter. It meant it had to be typewritten and put on the mimeograph and run off and mailed, an immediate mailing to the local presidents. We would sometimes have one letter in the mail and two more followed.

To be assigned to work at the convention was great background for me. I identified faces with names of people that I had corresponded. It was delightful because they asked me to sit close to Mrs. Hanson. She had a hearing problem, she needed someone to tell her things or just be there. Ms. Holtz was always the key person that saw that everything was implemented the way it should be. There was great preparation for the convention so when we really got there, in the beginning, I was almost like a visitor in the visitors section observing.

The people from New York were very excitable. Dr. Abraham Lefkowitz was a great speaker. It was fun to meet the people from the South. They came even from the Panama Canal Zone. There were two locals that existed long long

years from the Canal Zone, Balboa and Panama. Dr. Linville chaired the convention. There was not a strong friendly feeling between Florence Hanson and Dr. Linville. Florence Hanson was the secretary-treasurer. After the convention, it was always a heavy influx of work. The conventions were held in August usually the third week in August, then the school year began. Soon after the first convention that I attended, the communists began to surface.

Lina Holtz and I went to Philadelphia on the B & O Train and that was my first train ride. George Davis was the secretary-treasurer from Cleveland, Ohio. He was a man of few words, pleasant to deal with. It seemed, in my opinion, the officers were often elected from areas where we were organizing teachers. Whether it was to give them recognition or whether the candidate from that area was so enthusiastic that George Davis was from Cleveland, Ohio where Local 279 was growing and important and that was probably why he was elected.

As we go on John Eckland came from Denver and there was a great influx of members in Denver. Irving Kingsley was from Springfield, Ohio. Ohio was in the midst of organizing all their large cities that seemed to be the pattern. John Fewkes was a very active leader eventually local one and he was the president that seemed to be the way. The secretary-treasurer was the active officer in the AFT perhaps because it was the salaried position. The presidency was an honorary position.

Many people use positions in AFT to further their own interests. Dr. Jerome Davis was from Yale University some people even felt that he might have communistic tendencies but he was really a quaker. As the communistic influence became more prevalent, Dr. Counts was elected president. Dr. John L. Childs from New York and many other people with great names were brought to the surface. Some of the literature was filled with positive opinions and statements from these learned men and was probably to give the physical appearance that the AFT was not communist that they had these wonderful people on their side.

The convention in Philadelphia stands out in my mind, I was young and naive about all these things and they were interesting to me. The convention was held at the Sylvania Hotel. It was a dumpy place. There were no prearrangements made. George Davis was interested but not that interested. The City Hall had the ensigns lit up "Red Mist Over Philadelphia." Because the president did not attend the convention, Allie Mann from Atlanta, Georgia was appointed chairperson of the convention. She was a very capable, charming chairperson. Her beautiful southern accent and her composure held that riotous group together. The feelings were high and there was no air-conditioning. Ellie Mann got very tired and she relinquished the chair to another person who heckled her all during the convention. That added more than humor to the thoughts of the delegates.

George Davis was secretary-treasurer, his thought was to move the office to Cleveland, Ohio. Undercover Ellie Mann leaked the information to Lina

Holtz and behind-the-scenes it was brought before the post-convention meeting of the Council and it was overridden. George Davis did not come back to the AFT.

Local 5 had wonderful people, they could not stay in the AFT and carry on the way they were. The local in Los Angeles was infiltrated with communism, and the Philadelphia local. Those were the three prime locals that were expelled also a college local in New York City. Those were all key people in the organization and people that were very active. It was a great blow when we heard that these locals were going to be expelled. From our point of view we did not, of course, agree with the communistic influence but personally they were people that you would enjoy knowing and respected. They were very brilliant.

Many of the leaders of locals were vice-presidents of the AFT. They would always attend the meeting that was held between Christmas and the New Year. There was always a pre- and post-convention meeting of the newly elected officers. Many of them went on from year to year and we would begin to know them a little more seeing them three or four times a year. They were often, as I mentioned before, presidents of locals that were active or had accomplished some great victory in their cities.

Dr. Mary Foley Grossman was a leader of the Philadelphia local. She was a very charming and bright woman. Through just hear say, it was told that she had a breakdown after it all happened, physically and may be nervously

broke-down after the expulsion of the local and the claim that they were communists. Dr. George Counts was elected president. My experience with Dr. Counts was at the convention, he brought his handwritten address to me to type. He would stand by if I had any questions, I could see the handwriting now. He was very easy to please, very charming and women were all batting their eyes at Dr. Counts.

Dr. Counts while he was active he was really elected because of prestige. He was also in a group with Dr. John L. Childs, and other people of note. New AFT literature would be printed. There was also a beginning and an influx of college locals after Dr. Counts was elected. The group in Los Angeles was expanded and a new group formed there. Perhaps because of the distance of the California locals, I wasn't so aware of people, they may not of had the funds to come to conventions so I was not so familiar with people from California.

After George Davis decided not to accept the position of secretary-treasurer the office was run pro tem by Lina Holtz and a committee. There were tense moments but we carried on and Irving Kingsley was employed as secretary-treasurer I think until the convention convened and then he was elected officially. He came from Springfield, Ohio.

Irving Kingsley relied very much on Lina Holtz to carry on the duties of the office. He was in a way a dreamer, he had been a Latin teacher. The AFT needed larger quarters so they rented more space in the same building. The

editor of the magazine had an office, before that the secretary-treasurer had been the editor of the magazine. It was taken to New York and Celia Lewis was the editor. Following her George Guernsey was an editor and after George Guernsey, Mildred Burlman.

There seemed to be a need for more space. Mr. Kingsley arranged to rent a floor in the Stieger building and that was at 28th East Jackson. That was great because several of us had private offices. The editor was there and organizers began to have meetings in the office. That is another field all of its own, the story of the organizers of the AFT. They had to pioneer and ride buses and had very low expense accounts. They were finally given recognition and had a space to come to do their work report. The staff increased, Satterghwaite from Seattle, Washington was the active permanent AFT organizer. He was sent wherever there was a need and sent in every direction. He rode buses especially in Arkansas, charges kept coming in faster than you could process them.

Satterghwaite's interest in the AFT was because of the Yellow Dog contract in Seattle. He was successful and the victim in that case. He was very willing and able to work for the AFT, but he longed for that part of the world. He did not want to stay in the Midwest and end his career and affiliation with AFT. Because of the financial condition of AFT, there was very limited funds. These organizers rode buses and curtailed expenses the best they could. Their salaries were probably as equal as AFT could afford to a salary of a teacher. It was hard for people to be an organizer in AFT.

It means giving up so much personally, so many times it wrecked their personal lives. They had to be away from home too long and too much. They were on duty all the time not only during the day but meetings at night and weekends. It is still that way, it is tough. Of course now the AFT organizers are under contract, have a union of their own, have all their working conditions spelled out and have a different attitude about organizing. It is still a demanding job that can upset their personal lives but they have a director now that probably keeps all that in mind and things are at a different keel.

These particular people in the beginning that were AFT organizers were often victims of some poor working conditions. Things that happened to them personally, and that fired up their enthusiasm to form local unions to protect them. They had been on the firing line as it were, and knew from personal experience. They were willing to sacrifice. They were not glamorous figures but they were very sincere people and, of course, it was a real vocation for them to do this work.

There was not a large organizing staff at AFT. Very often, it would be someone referred through the Central Labor Body in the area that would give the clue that teachers were ripe for organization. Sometimes some key teacher there would take a temporary assignment. Some of the names that would come to the forefront were Claude Williams from the South, a preacher also a teacher and Harry Hazel from Ohio, not a very exciting personality either but probably very good at what he was doing in the area. At times

they would ask a teacher to take leave and go in the field and organize for a month or two. The organizers would call in very often, frantically for orders of literature or to send material to prospective members. We always paid great attention to their needs because they worked under hard conditions in the field without an office. Their salary checks were mailed from the AFT office always well in advance to wherever they had their base. They would work out of perhaps one city and go to several small cities as the occasion arose. They could draw people by word of mouth and publicity in local papers. Very often through the local Central Labor Bodies and the local State Federations of Labor.

On a humorous point there was always one piece of literature that always made us laugh it was "What It Is and What It Isn't." "Questions and Answers" was another piece of literature that was constantly in use. We sent all the samples of local literature, as the locals wrote up their own literature we would have samples. There would be a kit sent to the beginning locals showing them how to set up their local bookkeeping, membership cards, arrangements, back copies of victories of things that had happened. The American Teacher had a great part in it, of course, it would always have items about beginning new locals. The victories were always editorialized, publicized and used as examples. The pictures were wonderful.

A little emphasis on the financial side of AFT. The finances were always lean especially the expense accounts which had to be accounted for in a little book smaller than three-by-five, so you could carry it with you.

There were typewritten things tips, of course, every text was written. There was a good deal of time spent every day after you ate every meal to be sure and put down all these detailed things. To the best of my knowledge \$7.00 was about tops for three meals at a convention. The suites were given by the hotel usually gratis. Those were the suites that the office staff stayed in and they all wanted to go.

It was a plum to go to the convention, to see the people and have the joy and fun of it and to come back and talk about it all year. The expenses were so lean. One year we went to Glenwood Springs, Colorado and that was a convention site where Harding had his summer home. So, it was a plum to go everyone wanted to go. We got in cars and went. People were dressing and loaning each other clothes to wear in that part of the world thinking we did not know.

Selma Borchard sent a box for the girls in the office, riding habits from a way back when, and some other goofy stuff. We were in the suite a few young skits like myself, a package came we had to pay a fee on the express and we opened it. It was so outlandish and one of the staff members Florence Greavis, Director of Research wore a hat, every time we stopped the car this hat would roll out of the box. Mary, one of the staff girls and her sister were with us and we put on these clothes and made up an act. We invited Bill Wolfson from the New York local. He was the publicity man from Local 2 and needed a room, I guess he stayed up in the free part or put his camera equipment there. Mary put on this awful white panama hat that was trimmed

trimmed with field flowers. Demi stuck a pillow inside of her and had boots that looked like a German officer, and I had what was left khaki knickers. If I can put my hand on it there is a picture I kept. We had an act, we did not say a word but we invited select people that would not tell because we could not let her know that we made fun of her gift. We put on this act and it was riotous. Mary's act in this frock coat riding habit - she put the bowls of fruit sent from some place in the suite and she put two big apples and her act was to take one apple out and then the other and Demi just posed and I had Will Wilson's fishing net.

Everybody was doing active things in Glenwood Springs in addition to the convention so I just posed in the fishing net. We were very careful and had to pack the things but before we left we were over a day or so in the convention and walked through the hotel and they wanted us to put on an act for publicity for the convention. These behind-the-scenes stories seem ridiculous and funny but when you came back to the Chicago office and related them, it broke the hearts of those that didn't go and more wanted to go and worked toward the convention. I felt it was a great privilege to go, it was only the fun we put into it. We could have just left that box of clothes there and not had any fun.

Another point to emphasize there were a lot more activities at the convention itself. The caucuses were a great part of the AFT. They did a lot of entertaining. It was an accepted rule that the staff would not take part in any caucus. We never went to a caucus party. You could be used for

whatever reason but it was not your place to be there. A lot went on at these caucuses, the Progressive Caucus and the National Caucus, three or four new ones would sprout up but they were the powerful group behind-the-scenes. They had their own suites and their own parties and that was a great activity. As years went on we did break the rule and go to a few favorite ones just because we were invited and always well received. Special attention always came from Mae Naftal of Local 2 who invited me to the caucus headquarters for a visit or to be recognized for doing a lot of work. Those were nice little gestures that were important.

The Christmas party was another meager affair, we had it in the office. Christmas parties were not that popular but it got to be a part of working conditions. Now, the Christmas party is a great thing in the AFT people come back that have been there and some don't want to go. They were always a pain in the neck to me because the aftermath was hard. Mr. Kingsley wanted to have a party but in his odd way he cooked the food in some ridiculous way in the office. He liked wild rice and it got wilder every year until we reneged and insisted on being taken out. When Mr. Megel came the first thing he did was to take us to some popular restaurant and we had a real Christmas party.

The mechanical behind-the-scenes part of the election was important, you did not get the name of the candidates, of course, until they were nominated. At the very last minute a special shade of pink paper was used for the ballot and usually you did it wrong three times before it was approved by the committee. You either left out or misspelled or it was not

placed right on the ballot or the box did not suit them and then it was run off on the mimeograph. The staff worked on it and a committee probably an election committee came and stood around the mimeograph so that no ballots would be cheated. Someone made some homemade ballot boxes and they were carried from year in and year out to the convention to deposit the proper ballot in the proper box. They did get voting machines later and it was all done as it is now on a computer. But in the beginning, it was an evil eye watching every piece of pink paper that came out of that mimeograph.

Mr. Kinglsey was dismissed from AFT. It was very sad. I often thought of Goodbye Mr. Chips. It was done in a hard way at a Council meeting at Christmastime at the LaSalle Hotel and we were hovering in the background. I did not know it, Lina knew it but she did not want to upset me and tell me. When he came out with the word, it was rumored but I did not hear it directly and it happened just that night. It ended that day, he had no more duties. But before that I can't remember exactly but one of the reasons he was dismissed was that they felt that he did not present the true picture of the AFT. It was not a matter of anything financial but he did present a different picture of the size of the membership or the reasons for things in his report. They felt that they did not get the true picture of the way things were and that was one of the reasons or the causes for dismissal.

Mr. Kinglsey was a conservative secretary-treasurer. He was very shy almost to a fault. He did not like meeting people, he would avoid it almost

to the extreme. Almost back away at one time in a corner of the room not wanting to meet certain people, "tell them I am not here." It would come over him that way, sort of may be I don't know if it was a phobia, but it was a personality flaw that it was hard for him to meet people. When he gave his address it was like a different person, you would not know even his voice would change. He was very withdrawn and not close to a great many people. He was close to John Fewkes they were very understanding of each other. They went to certain meetings in Washington together and seemed to understand each other but he was not that easy to meet.

As a Latin teacher he was a classical student, he brought the Latin subject into things more than you would realize. In his contact with the locals Mr. Kingsley's personality prevailed, he was withdrawn. He was dutiful about appearing but did not extend himself as strongly as an AFT organizer or as a president or other officers. He was always shy and in the background. He truly had great ability in a different field probably a wonderful teacher. He had part of the time some very poor health with his throat condition may be that had something to do with not trying to put himself over as a good speaker.

The secretary-treasurer while he was the leading officer, at a convention he ran the convention but he did not have a lot of speaking to do. The president then was the chairperson and presented himself and represented the AFT in that role. So it was not so important for him he was not speaking before that delegation as much as the president would speak. He gave his

report and he was referred to for decisions on financial matters and the direction of the convention in different fields. He was supposed to be I suppose not political, but I am sure he was in the background. He represented the Ohio locals as well and he headed the Ohio State Federation. He was loyal to Ohio. He would not take part probably shouldn't, but he was not socially involved with the caucuses when they were held in Ohio. The people we knew from Ohio were easier sometimes to know than Mr. Kingsley. Carl Benson was from Toledo and Dorothy McFeeney all these were wonderful people and the president I have forgotten his name were wonderful leaders from Ohio. Mr. Kingsley was from Springfield. It was a local that was not too active it flourished but it had no special significance.

Mr. Fewkes was very enthusiastically accepted by the delegates and a very dynamic leader in the AFT, and of course in the Chicago Local 1, he was there when it was formed. He went through their hardship of payless pay days and was a very forceful figure. The AFT didn't have space and he shared the office I had. He was teaching at a technical high school and came in after school so I had buddy buddy relations with John Fewkes when he came in the office. I would often leave and go in the workroom or someplace else to give him the courtesy of having the office alone. He did not come in every day he did not have to but we shared the same office. He and Mr. Kingsley understood each other. They would go on organizational trips or things together and they came back with stories and I am sure they had fun. They enjoyed each other and understood each other.

Mr. Fewkes was a very dynamic leader. The offices of the Chicago local were across the street from us on Wabash Avenue. They had a fine staff. They had their own problems. They had a secretary-treasurer that was dismissed, Kermit Ebbey and that was a fiery time for that local. With those things in mind it seemed very ethical that we would never step over the line of being friendly with the Chicago local. The clerical staff were not back and forth nor Mr. Kingsley, we stayed in our own specific areas. The Chicago local was across the street, it did not mean there were any special favors because the Chicago local was so close to the National.

It was a great meeting at the Auditorium Theatre, anyone knowing Chicago realized how outstanding it was and a very large theater. The acoustics are still used. The theater is still used, it is a landmark in Chicago. It had to be at the Auditorium because it would house the number of delegates of the Chicago local teachers who came to that meeting. They filled it to capacity. The meeting was held because it was the formation, the first big meeting of the Chicago teachers as Local 1. Mr. Fewkes was the leader, an outstanding leader. He could have been on the stage acting his personality was very magnetic, and he joined them as a leader they were one. It was a great thing in Chicago, the Chicago Local 1. If you turn your television on in Chicago now the political scene is on and the opinion of the Chicago Local is always respected and brought to the forefront.

The present president of the Chicago Federation of Labor replaced Mr. Fewkes as president of Local 1. Mr. Healey is a vice-president of AFT and was recently elected as the president of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

Another story that I recollect, I mentioned earlier in this interview that the AFT had an influx of people coming to the office in the afternoons. The deputy WPA was a popular and necessary part of life and they organized WPA locals in certain areas. There was one in New York and Chicago. The delegate or the leader from the WPA local in Chicago would come in the office his name was Harold Gibbons. He was a tall, sober, palefaced, serious looking man. We had an idea he must be very poor, his clothes were always the same. When he found out we had coffee in the afternoon he came regulary and we felt so sorry he ate so much of whatever was there we tried to get more. I don't know whether he knew if we were sorry for him but we really didn't know whether we liked him or didn't because he was so much to himself. He did come from Wisconsin. He died recently within the last year or so. He was a leader in the Teamsters Union and he did the greatest courtesies and help to the St. Louis local. He helped them in their collective bargaining and he was never accused of any of the misgivings that were active in the Teamsters Union, may be his influence may have kept him off that track. He had a cultural career later in St. Louis.

Mr. Megel came in as president at a turning point in the AFT. He had a great personality and won people to his side easily. He was very forward acting. He employed a great team connected with the office for publicity Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kaylor who assisted him. It was like a fairy story happening behind-the-scenes, the Christmas party the social like feeling was there. The Kaylors also edited the magazine. Mr. Kaylor was a hard-nosed journalist. Mrs. Kaylor was real publicity all the things you would like to

have happen she could see that they were done. We had a happy feeling everybody was remembered and recognized. Mr. Megel had foresight to know that you get people to do and build these things, he would not even have to do it. Mr. or Mrs. Kaylor would see a different tone and a different feeling was presented about the AFT, of course, it got to be political.

The editor before that did not stay she was an active person in the AFT her name was Mildred Burlman. The Kaylors were in charge of editing the magazine in addition to handling publicity and press and that was their field. They were from Kansas. They knew how and Mr. Megel could take credit for that because they took that burden and took a part AFT needed. Politically everyone did not think that way sometimes they were more critical of Mr. Kaylor than Mrs. Kaylor. His personality was gruff and different and no nonsense a really true hard person but she softened the way and Mr. Megel always recognized that the Kaylor's were very helpful to him.

I was in an awkward position as secretary. Lina Holtz was leaving and a short time after her term she wanted to retire. It was retirement time then there was no set desire but she retired at sixty-five and the skirmish of who would take her place. Mr. Megel had a secretary assigned to him before he became the sole officer and there would be no reason why Marie Rodgers wouldn't continue. I was out in no man's land for a short time but Mr. Megel was really understanding. I was appointed by the Council as Lina Holtz's replacement and it was part of his decision as well but I was known among the staff and I think I expected it.

There was a little undercurrent things would happen, I would hear that Mrs. Kaylor was suggesting that one of her daughters be appointed. You would hear a little inner gossip but Mr. Megel was easy to work for. I was given more responsibility by taking Lina's place with different ideas, not that hers weren't true and great but they did not apply to the years that AFT was larger and operating on a different scale.

I think I took hold of the situation well. There were no black people on the staff not for any reason, it just didn't happen. Mary Herrick a very active person in the AFT from Local 1 was retiring and took a part-time assignment as a research director. She was the one who suggested we employ this person she knew, Evelyn Thomas a black girl and a very capable girl. She came into the office that was the beginning of our staffing the office as best you could on an equal basis. From then on it was a duty I had to see these points of view expressed just the way the chips fell. I did not have to extend myself beyond peoples abilities but without anyone explaining it to me it was an expected arrangement. The present staff and the staff that I left at AFT were always well balanced and I was very fortunate to get great people in the AFT of all denominations. We had Orientals, we had Spanish and we had Black people without any problem.

The problem of the southern locals, seven locals were given direction either to integrate or they would be no longer part of the AFT. These things were very difficult to endure. We were probably more able to follow through because the AFT was strong and militant and would continue as the AFT. The

previous experience proved that. Previous experiences were of course the dismissal of locals because of their communist tendencies. In addition to all the other forward activities of AFT an important part was the development of research director. There were research directors assigned, Florence Green from the Gary local was one of the outstanding ones. She probably prepared one of the first reviews of salary schedules all over the country and on every subject that was brought to her attention. She was a dynamic leader in Gary Local 4 and a very capable person assigned to this job.

Dr. George Reuter came from the south he was not there as long. He did come into the office when Mr. Megel was there and moved from his southern assignments to the AFT. Mary Herrick, a very outstanding active woman in the AFT from Local 1 who was there from the beginning with the Federation of Women Teachers was retiring from her school assignment and available. She took it on a temporary assignment but she too did research work. Research very often seeing that resolutions from the convention on different subjects were implemented and the needs of certain locals. We were always in challenges or conflict with the NEA they had much more money and bigger departments. They were in this field and they would try to keep up their standards to equal or even go beyond if they could. So the research department got to be very important and very active, it still continues in the AFT.

Carl Megel was very untiring in his efforts to service the locals. He traveled, he was very gracious about acknowledging efforts of local leaders,

there was always correspondence, always recognition. If he did not fill the role he was very adept at assigning someone who would take his place. It was exhausting and it was very tiring, but he was at the peak of a career and could do it well. He was very enthusiastic and a very social person.

During his reign the AFT bought its first building, it was at 716 North Rush. The building was bought from the American Library Association. They had restored this old what they referred to as Brownstone, it was at one time the shore was very close to Rush Street. It was near a very attractive area now called the Magnificent Mile. The building was a thrill for me to see the AFT in their own quarters. It was three stories. The Association had done great work restoring wooden stairwells and doors. Some of the doors were oval in shape. There was a butler's pantry that served as a coffee room. There was a basement equipped. There was one balky elevator. Mr. Megel the presidents office was on the second floor with a bay window. It was through whatever I could add to it, Mrs. Kaylor helped in designing furniture and draperies. It was fun to choose wallpaper of the

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The AFT Defense Committee was another integral part of the activities of the AFT. There were outstanding people assigned to that committee. It was usually a small committee the cases sometimes had to be acted on immediately. Very often, they were a continuing case and they were scheduled to be decided at a meeting. They got to be so prevalent that very often the secretary-treasurer or responsible officer at the time would confer with the committee, with the attorney and a decision would be made. It would always be formalized sometimes decisions had to be made before the committee could meet physically together. They always met at the Convention and at Council meetings, it is such a part of the AFT. In the AFT budget an amazing amount of money is referred to the AFT Defense Committee.

After John Ligtenberg died, the law firm under the direction of Larry Poltrock, who was then a partner continued in the same capacity. The history of the Defense Cases is part of the archives in the Wayne State Labor Library. One of the assignments I undertook for part-time work after I left AFT, it was just for about two months but I did compile an outline of the Defense Cases in the secretary-treasurers office. They were referred to the Wayne State Library and all the decisions and history of the cases can be found in microfilm at that library. The Defense Cases are an appalling assignment of work at the AFT. When the Council or even the AFL have their meetings they combined their duties with the work to continue the progress of decisions on these cases. They have to take advantage of every opportunity to keep up with the pressure and the volume of these Defense Cases.

CATHERINE MCGOURTY INTERVIEW

March 17, 1987

Tape 2

John Ligtenberg was the general counsel during my regime at the AFT. I took his dictation from the very beginning. I was never in awe of him, we were always easy to work together. I would send for our sandwiches from the B & G Sandwich Shop, funny names to the sandwiches I would order. I knew what he liked and because of the slim goings on at AFT, we each paid for our own sandwiches.

Mr. Ligtenberg was a great part of the AFT. He excelled in the subject of tenure for teachers and wrote wonderful leaflets. All that, of course, is in the library referred to later in this program. He was responsible for many outstanding decisions in the AFT. One of the pleasant experiences we all shared with him was the case that was tried in the Supreme Court in Washington. It was known as the Pickering Case. It was in the early 60's it was known as the Pickering vs. Board of Education case in which the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the right of teachers to express their political views without intimidation. AFT won the decision 9 to 1 by the Supreme Court in favor of the teacher. It was argued in April and came up in June, 1968 and it is a landmark case.

During the regime of AFT at the address at Rush Street, part of it was glamorous because of the location and the AFT was going forward with all things that were important. Dave Selden was an assistant in the president's office, Charlie Cogen, of course, was the president. It seemed to me that it was an honorary position. While the president was the salaried officer, he had enough people to delegate many of the assignments of work that the president formally took care of. Dave Selden being so familiar with New York and New York being the leading local was well able to carry on.

The secretary-treasurer's assignments grew. The staff grew. The departments began to develop. The organization department developed into a very large part of the AFT. There was a great staff in the field organizing locals. They were seldom in the office but all of that created a lot more work. Dr. Reuter was still the director of research. The Kaylors did not continue to edit the magazine. It was phased out at the time when Mr. Megel's retirement was imminent and he was vying for the office of Director of Legislation in Washington. Dave Elsil was the new editor of the American Teacher. He came from the Detroit, Michigan area, a very capable person. His assistant was Pat Strandt. Those were all new faces in the AFT. The office was a thrill to be in this former Presidents of the Harvester McKormack's. It was very evident that it would not continue to house all the new departments and things were developing so the AFT had to rent more space in another building on Michigan Avenue.

The AFT was going through great transition during this period. The New York local was successful in their collective bargaining. They were in

power. They were taking over power. In many cases new staff were employed and, of course, they were from New York. The scene behind-the-scenes was really all New York dominantly New York and its followers. The writing was on the wall. They all were talking about moving the office to Washington to be near legislation and be acknowledged but that can come to the forefront. Every year there were resolutions presented about this at the convention but at this time there were no excuses offered. It was very obvious that was in the offing. Mr. Megel's retirement was coming up and he applied and was appointed legislative representative and left the AFT office and established an office of legislation in Washington.

Mr. Cogen was the leader but a quiet behind-the-scenes leader supported by the confidence of everyone and Mr. Selden implemented all those things. Bob Porter carried on with a greater load always as secretary-treasurer and there was really a happy time in the AFT exciting because of the increase in membership. When they reached the 100,000 mark, it was great jubilation and, of course, it was mostly in New York. There were trends of increase in membership in other parts because of the influence of New York. Perhaps some of the pressures felt by the staff because of the political change in the AFT were the times itself, the power of New York taking over.

There were never idle days in the AFT. There were pleasantries. I know it seemed like I always worked and wanted to work. There was freedom and easy spirit but it wasn't actually regimentation but there were deadlines to be met. There were meetings going on and there were pressures. There

were not unpleasantries but when the staff began to get the feeling of power, some of the clerical staff, the people I had control of were feeling the pressures of things changing. People who were involved with other responsibilities did not want to make a move. The demands were about equal. Some were very excited about the new offices but in a short time they were not adequate, so the writing was on the wall there would be more changes coming. The time worn resolution of the office move to Washington became more of a reality. Mr. Selden always carried the ball for Charlie Cogen. He was not just a figurehead, he was capable and able but Mr. Selden was the one that brought things to the surface.

The secretary-treasurer went on indefinitely with the same responsibilities but more of them. It is hard to say there were any great pressures on individuals, generally you could feel an atmosphere of power from dominant locals. Behind-the-scenes the referendum vote was counted by the clerical staff out of the office at a designated space at the Congress Hotel. It was sad because the staff who were counting it, weren't very many caring about moving to Washington. I don't recall presently, it was an overwhelming majority to move. Plans were made and negotiations with the Office Employees Union and the AFT were realized. The staff were all invited to go but not coerced or promised any great prizes to go, it was up to them. Those were emotionally hard times.

The committee went to Washington and rented space at 1012 14th Street. I went at a later date to view the offices. It was just an overnight visit,

and 14th Street was 14th Street. Nothing exciting about the space not as glamorous as the area that we left and we just took it in stride. The detailed plans of moving the office became a little more difficult. The order department was sent in advance. One of the office workers from that department was sent ahead to set up that particular part of it. The rest of the staff were arranging buying homes or establishing themselves. I did what I needed to do to set myself up. It was moved in August at the same time the convention was held.

The plan for the move to Washington was that there would be a luncheon at the Aloop Hotel. A lovely luncheon no one should come back to the office that day that was the end leave from the luncheon. There were tears and it was hard to leave. We had no close association with the Chicago local but before I left, we all had a nice luncheon together.

Ten Twelve Fourteenth Street was adequate for the number of people on the staff at the AFT. It was just a very ordinary office the location was at the border of not a very enticing neighborhood in Washington. The AFT occupied three floors, partitions put up wherever necessary for offices. Not any special amenities in that area or in that office.

Another outstanding incident in the regime of Dave Selden was when he went to jail in the Newark strike. It was unbelievable to me that really could happen. We all were very tender about it. He was brave. I don't know how brave but we did see him off. When he was released a delegation from the

office went to a hotel in Newark, and we went to the jail to meet him. It was a great party and it was almost tearful. I can see the enthusiasm and the tenderness of everyone walking up a wide area of space when he came out. I probably nearly fell apart, it was so real. The party was a short one but it showed a lot of loyalty, regard and respect. As would be expected, the people of course were from the Newark local and anyone that was available to go. The administrative staff at the office were expected to go, and they were all there. It was another outstanding experience in AFT.

On a lighter side someone was singing a song and it was a song that the inmates were singing at the time Dave was in jail, we never hummed that tune in the office. In my opinion, Dave Selden was a loyal AFT officer but he was a very private person. Perhaps you would not know him beyond being president. He did entertain the AFT at a very interesting party. Some of the Chicago people, the staff who had left were visiting me at the time and, of course, they were invited. He had this lovely party at his home and he was very cordial and it was delightful to have someone there. I really was not that close to Dave Selden may be I had closer relations with Charlie Cogen as a president than Dave Selden. Why? I don't know, just different personalities. He always cooperated with anything I was doing but my work was directed through the office of the secretary-treasurer. It wasn't any particular reason, unless he wanted something special from me that I had any reason to decide some opinion or feeling about him. He ran independently, he really was not that close to people in the office. I am sure there were

conflicts with some of the staff, things that I would not be concerned about. I don't recall them now, but he was probably a very good officer. It was very evident that Al Shanker was going to take over.

Jim Mundy was a very outstanding leader in organization. He did come into the AFT while we were in Chicago at 716 North Rush. He was from Scranton, Pennsylvania. Rose Claffey was often critical both ways of Mundy. In a friendly but critical direction, at meetings things would come up and I could hear her give him some motherly advice about how he should proceed. He was very enthusiastic and hardworking. He was in the office but he was also in the field a great deal. The nature of being an organizer is a difficult assignment and they were adding more people all the time. Chuck Richards was also another outstanding AFT organizer and down the line wonderful people were employed.

The department ran under the direction of Mundy and almost by itself. I often think they did not feel a part of AFT because they were not in the scene in the office. I understand now that the organization has more relations with the administrative staff and the organizers. They are more one of the staff. They might have felt and they probably were a separate unit of the AFT, maybe because of the nature of their work. I had very little contact with them. Very often, not wanting to but I would not know who they were when they came in the office. If maybe we could do things over it would have been a smoother way if they were part of the AFT from the very beginning. I am referring more to the staff in the office. They were people you heard of and knew and there were successes but it was behind-the-scenes

as far as my contact with them. I would meet them and know who they were. I would meet them if they came to the convention. Very often they did not want them to come to the convention because they did not want them to be political. They were hardworking people and the nature of being an organizer is a hard assignment. I think they felt maybe it was missed that they weren't more a part of the staff.

The comparison of the beginning of AFT and the growth of the AFT by its very nature separated people. We gave more recognition and had more personal contact with the AFT organizers when the AFT was small, poor and struggling. May be a lot more was expected of the present or new regime of organizers because by nature it was all operated on a different scale. They had a director. They were not under the direction of an officer of the AFT. They were under the direction of Jim Mundy or whoever was the director of organization.

As the political scene changed the AFT and the New York local had predominance. More people from New York would appear in the office. Al Shanker came with other delegates. I don't know that from my point of view, I would recognize then that he was going to be president of the AFT. I certainly had no strong reaction just that he was another leader in the group. He looked tired very often. They would come in on sort of fast trips. He was thinner and younger worked harder I am sure.

Al Shanker came to the AFT office at the prime of great things for the AFT. One of the first things that happened, he was appointed to the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO. He had great contact with the labor circle in Washington. He was out of the office a great deal. I don't remember now whether he commuted or whether he established residence in the Washington area. New departments were developed and new directors came mostly from New York.

He had delegated new assistants some of the people that were carry-overs but a great many changes occurred. He had great assistance with department directors. While my direction of duties were usually assigned from the office of the secretary-treasurer Bob Porter and his assistant Bob Ripperger, I was of course aware of some of the activities in the president's office. I cooperated with whatever the program happened to be, but it was very obvious that with these new departments formed and new directors appointed that would relieve the president of a great many duties that were formerly taken care of by the office of the president.

There were directors of organization, directors of research, directors of the editorial, legislative, travel even research extended beyond that to a library assistant, director of library and new titles that are not on the tip of my tongue right now but they seemed to be happening right along. Al Loewenthal was a director under the office of the president. I am sure there were day to day things that Al Loewenthal could handle. Because all of these new departments developed, we did not have great contact with the

president. He was not a figurehead but we did not see him as often. There were staff meetings and they were held usually on Monday or Tuesday early and sometimes he was there and sometimes he wasn't. He was very capable and able. I don't remember any great details how his office operated. I don't know whether he wrote his own speeches or whether they just came out of the blue, not quite that, but there was never any burden of work on my part directly from the office of the president.

His office was furnished with interesting furniture. Things from trips and unusual things. The office at Dupont Circle was larger and could house all of these different departments. It was so large that the space alienated you from knowing a lot of things that were going on. It was one wing and another wing and unless it was a staff meeting and you were informed each department sort of ran on its own. You were directing a majority of the work but the policymaking and the decisions were not always brought to my attention first. I would glean it or Bob Porter was always very cooperative about informing me of important things that happened or were going to happen and it paved the way.

I could preface all these things I want to say about Bob Porter, complimentary words but beside all that he has great understanding of people. A magnetic personality to draw people to his confidence and direction and very fair-minded. A very hardworking man, he has surrounded himself with a staff in the finance department of capable people. He had the experience as many of the officers had of organizing a local and taught in

the schools in East St. Louis. In St. Louis he was in battle, as we would say in the AFT, and knows from the background what it is to organize a local and be part of the union movement. I am sure he is accepted in the labor circle in Washington as one of the outstanding officers. He has a great talent for delegating responsibility and a great sense of loyalty.

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