

An Interview with

CARL MEGEL

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

I am a Hoosier from Indiana. I was born on a farm in the southern part of the state. I call it the Clay Hills because that is what it was. My grandparents settled there many years ago. I will tell you about each of these because their history is very very interesting.

My grandfather Megel was born in Metz, France. He lived in a small stone house and one Sunday evening there was a knock on the door and a

gentleman said, "Are you Mrs. Megel?" She said, "Yes." He said, "You know that in France when a boy is 16 he has to spend two years for military training and your son Peter according to my records is now ready to go to training." She said, "Yes, he is about ready to go." "That is why I am here, I think that records show that you had a son who died in the service." She said, "Yes, that is right." "That means that Peter does not have to go because the law says if one son dies in service the next one does not have to go. Therefore, I want to pay you 2,000 francs," which is at this time about \$500.00, "to go for my son because the law also says you either have to go or pay some other boy to go in your place."

Well, that was great news. That was a pot of gold to us we only had two and a half acres of land. And my mother had sheep so we got all our clothes of the wool. We had potatoes that we raised and grapes and things like that on two and a half acres. We were very poor. So he said, "Come on down and we will make up a contract tomorrow." So we went down and got a hold of the magistrate. He said, "Well look that is fine but I have a son who has to go and I would like to have Peter go for my son but my trouble is I only have 1,200 francs." Mother said, "There is no reason for taking 1,200 if we can get 2,000." He said, "Yes it is because if you don't take my 1,200, I'll not write out the contract." So, what else could we do? So they took the 1,200. Peter gave it to his mother and said, "Buy an acre and a half land right next to ours that is for sale." So she did and my grandfather who spoke German and French when he came spoke German to me when he told me this story. "Dann habe wir est gut," that means, "Then we have it good," because they had an acre and a half more land to grow from and also one less mouth to feed, which was important.

After two years Peter came back and said, "I am going to the United States, I got enough money back." So he went to the United States all by himself and he settled in a French community called, Cheviet down near Cincinnati, Ohio. Later, Peter made it possible to bring my grandfather over in 1849. My grandfather was born in 1833. Then he met a lady whose grandfather came over from Metz, France in 1834 whom he married in 1859.

In 1909 I was nine years old, they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary and I was there. My other grandfather came from Bavaria in Germany right across the Mississippi River from Metz although they did not know each other. Also, they settled on a farm down in the Clay Hills across the road from my grandfather Megel. Their name was Kirsh. Mention my grandfather Kirsh because his name was Bolser, his father John and his brother John all three served three and a half years in the Civil War which was a tremendous history. They volunteered when Lincoln in 1861 asked for 75,000 volunteers. They served the entire three and a half years in various battles.

I have always been very much interested in the history of my grandparents because it had such great influence upon on my life. Here were people who served our country and became Americanized in a very short time. There was a difference though, my grandfather Megel left France under Napoleon III and under tyranny therefore, he became a citizen a year and a half later. My grandfather Kirsh left because of poverty in Germany and Bavaria and therefore he left because of the poverty situation affected their family.

This had some influence upon my life. My grandfathers settled in a German community in Indiana. As I said, that is southern Indiana Jennings County poor Clay Hills. As my grandfather told me many times that when we came here there was nothing here but trees and Indians so it was very difficult.

My father and mother were married in 1890 and they settled on one of the farms that my grandfather Megel had. This German community was a separate community from the community north of us where a little town of Hayden was situated where the high school was that I went to school. These people in the Hayden area were mostly old line Yankees we called them of what we would call their more English ancestry. The people in the community where I lived were German, French and central Europe ancestry.

Now you know at that time if I went to Seymour, eleven miles away it took us three and a half hours. So, even though people across the railroad tracks were a mile away it still was quite a little distance. Not like today when it would not mean anything. My father and mother settled on the land that my grandfather owned in 1890 when they were married. My father had gone to a country school about grade four. He could read very well. He was an intelligent man. He knew mathematics very well but a terrifically hard worker. We had clay land which was so hard to farm. We all had to work extremely hard in order to make a living on that farm. My mother went to school to the sixth grade.

I need to tell you about the story that she told about schools because it had such an effect upon the education throughout our country for many many

years. A school board which was elected in the community hired a man teacher. This is a story that my mother told me. They paid him \$5.00 a month and room and board. Now how did he get his room and board? Well, one week he would stay with Mary and her family. The second week he would stay with Jimmy and his family and so on around. I cannot and I never could understand how terribly oppressive this must have been to live in with the families at that time in about 1870-1875. Many of them living in a one-room log cabin probably sleeping with the children. Sitting with them in the evening and the evenings were long on the farm, telling stories, helping them with their school work. This oppression, this domination of a community over their teacher has had an effect upon our educational system even in a minor way to this very day. It was one of the things that I never forgot in all of my life and all of the things that I did later.

Because we lived in a German community everybody spoke German. Therefore, when I went to school in this English community where nobody spoke German everybody spoke English, I was the little lost sheep. I remember my first day so well the only word I could say was Carl. My teacher, however was very sympathetic because her father had served in the Civil War with my grandfather and therefore took good care of me and helped me along. But it was a very difficult three-year period to learn the language, and to try to learn to read and write. At that point I am going to say that because of this experience, I have great empathy for the many people who are now coming from other countries speaking other languages and coming to school with bilingual education programs. However, the one thing that I remember was that my father and mother as well as all four of my grandparents insisted that I learn English. It was never any question. We might have spoken

German around at home but when I was in school, English was the subject and my parents insisted on it. It is one topic that is so important even to this very day in our own country. I think that the idea that we have one language, the English language is the important issue. People should learn and maintain their native language but in this country English is our national language and that everybody should become proficient in it. It was one of the things that I learned at home.

The present time we have a great influx of individuals people who come from latin countries who speak Portugese or Spanish or Italian who have a different concept and a deeper commitment to their own language and want to maintain it. That is what has caused some of our difficulties so far as bilingual language teaching in our schools is concerned. You have right in New York a settlement of one or two million people who came from Puerto Rico. They are American citizens but they want to speak Spanish. You talk about English and they say, "What for we don't need it." These people speak Spanish and they are going to stay here but they do not have a broader concept of United States and education.

I sat with my grandfather when he was 88 years old. He told me the story about how he got here and he said something that was very profound that I never forgot. I never forgot that because he said he had it very hard in France when I was young but your grandmother and I had it very hard here when we came and there was nothing here but trees and Indians. But there is one difference. In this country you can get an education and if you have an education there is no limit to where you can go. I thought this was a profound statement from a man who had never been in school a day in his

life. I never forgot. I went to school when I was six years old and I said I could speak only German. By the time I was in the third grade, I was reading very well. Of course, we had long evenings on the farm and I also worked on the farm in the summertime and all the time come home from school, I had to do the chores. One event that I never forgot.

I was ten years old and my father had typhoid fever and he had forty acres of wheat to cut. He had a binder and so a cousin of my father's came by and my father said, "Lawrence can you shock the wheat for us?" You see at that time we did not have combines like now we had to shock it up and then the thrush machine came. Lawrence said, "Well yes and get somebody to cut it." My dad said, "If you take the horses and hitch them up to the binder Carl will run the binder." He looked at me and said, "Oh, he is not able to do that." And my Dad said, "Yes, he can do that." I cut the forty acres of wheat with a mule and three horses at ten years old. It was an experience that I never forgot.

The same attitude about education. I was determined to make good grades because I was the German boy from across the tracks. The B & O Railroad divided us and communities at that time were pretty well congested. I was subject of much discrimination but, did not bother me too much because I was determined I was going to show these guys up. The result was that I became the best athlete and I became the best student. I graduated as valedictorian of my school in 1918. The advantage that I had all these years however, at a small school and we never had more than seven or eight in a class. If I had

forty in a class, I don't know how I would have learned a new language but with seven or eight, it is possible to do it.

Part of our troubles in our American schools today are the overcrowding, the very large classes that I have always campaigned against. At graduation in the township in Indiana and to this day in a small township the township trustee is elected by the people and he has complete control of the township schools, roads and everything. My father became township trustee in 1916. One day he said to me just before I graduated, "Well Carl now what are you going to do? If you stay here you can be a farmer but, he said, "I am trustee and I have five one-room country schools. You can go to Franklin for twelve weeks and you can get a certificate to teach and I will give you a school if you want to do that." "Well," I said, "I certainly don't want to be a farmer." And he said, "I am sure you didn't because that farm was very, very hard work and no money. My folks always had plenty to eat but we did not have an awful lot of money.

I went to Franklin for twelve weeks. However, in order to get a Teaching Certificate, I had to take an examination which was prepared by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Indianapolis. The County Superintendent of Schools held that exam on the last Saturday of each month so I took that exam and passed it the first time. Had eight subjects to take and averaged up. Now, the interesting thing about that is your salary was determined by your grade. For instance, there were five of us who took that exam from a graduating class of seven. My grade was the highest. It was ninety-two average. Ninety-two times a multiplier gave me two twenty-five which was \$2.25 a day that was my salary \$45.00 a month for a six month

term. My colleague who made ninety, times a multiplier got \$2.20 a day. In other words, my two points more gave me a nickel a day more. That was used at that time and I had a county certificate which permitted me to teach in the county.

We went to Franklin for twelve weeks and I went to one of the schools that my father assigned me to. I had eight grades. Small classes one or two or three or four in a class. All country kids. Some of the nicest kids there was not ever any problem in discipline. They all studied well. I had no difficulty in anyway shape or form and I know that I did a very nice job. Those kids got a better elementary education than many of our kids in the bigger high schools in the cities. My children my son and my daughter went to the elementary schools in Chicago and they did not get near the education that my little kids out there in that little country school got when I was teaching.

This country school was a pleasure to teach in because the parents were interested in their kids. If the teacher did not do a good job the trustee heard about it from the parents. Nobody ever came to see you. I had no visitors in the whole six months. The reason it was six months because the farmers needed the boys out on the farm at the beginning of April to help on the farm and therefore schools were six months. Later it became seven months and then finally eight when they made it a consolidated school.

I want to make sure that you understand the freedom I had as a teacher in that country school. It was a real pleasure. I had wonderful kids. The

parents were farmers but they were interested in their children. They took an interest in me provided socials and parties for the school and we just all had a very nice time. I had a big coal stove in the center of the room and I had to pay one of the boys twenty-five cents a day to put the fire in the stove and that is how we kept warm. The parents had to buy the books. The books were recommended by the State Board of Education and were available at the little store in Hayden. The parents went there and bought the books for their kids, so there was no problem about having books and they all did. While everyone in the community was a farmer, had enough to eat, had a little money but not much, they still had enough to supply their children with their needs. Nice clothes and books and supplies so they could get a good education.

After graduation from Franklin, I got a job as teacher in Charleston, Illinois and there I met my wife. I went from there to several other schools and finally got to Palatine, Illinois which is in Cook County just out of Chicago in 1931. Before I got there I must tell you an incident that had great affect upon my life.

I was teaching in a community and the principal said now Thursday and Friday we are going to go to the institute. If you go you will be paid. If you don't go you won't get paid. The institute was held in a big gymnasium there must have been about ten thousand teachers there. And, there was an organization in Illinois called the Illinois Education Association, and I had not joined the organization it is my early years. And as I came to the door there were two ladies standing there and one of them said, "May I see your IEA card?" And I said, "I am not a member." "Then you can't get in here."

Oh, for goodness sake, what do I do? I don't want to lose two days pay only making \$1,700. And she said, "There is a lady sitting right over there, you go over there and pay your dues," which I did but I resented that to this very day. And later when I became AFT president I found out that the Education Association had no right to run the Institute. The law said that the County Superintendent is to hold the institute. Therefore later on, I saw to it that the County Superintendent run the Institute. Anyway the other incident that was still more impressive and harmful.

I was able to get a job as athletic coach. I had been a good athlete. I made nine letters at Franklin College where I had gone to school. And, Franklin was well known in athletics at that time because they had the Franklin Wonder Five basketball team which won the national championship. I was a part of that team although not first stringer. I had played professional football with the Waukegan Elks when I was in Chicago and we won the championship of the league there which had eighty-five teams in it.

I got a job teaching at Casey, Illinois which is down in the southern part of the state. It is in Clark County and one of the poorest counties in the state. However, the oil tanks that they brought the oil from Oklahoma and Texas on pipes, and they dumped it into these oil tanks in Clark County because the tax rate was low. Therefore, they did not have to pay high taxes as they would in Gary, Hammond and East Chicago, Indiana where the refineries were, therefore, the school district had a lot of money. I got a good salary as a coach but, of course, there was no tenure in Illinois and I only got a one-year contract.

There were five members on the School Board. Three of them were doctors. One of the doctors was a chiropractor his name was Butler. The Board president told me, "Now Megel whenever you want anything you go see Doctor Butler and he will take care of you." I went to see Doctor Butler. Now remember I had coached several years besides the community I had lived in was a community where everybody was respectable and honest and decent. And I talked to Doctor Butler and he said, "Carl I am going to send you a man from Terre Haute and whatever you want you buy. We have lots of money." So the man came in to see me and he said, "What do you need?" I said, "I need footballs." He laid one out he said, "\$15.00." Well, I could buy them for \$8.50. "What else do you need?" I said, "Shoulder pads \$12.00." I could buy them for \$8.00 and on down the line. So I said, "Well I can't give you an order today I want to see Doc Butler first."

I went to see Doc Butler and I said, "Doc this man is booking us." And he said, "What do you mean?" And, I told him. And I know he looked out the window for a long time and he turned around and he said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well I can buy them from Lowe & Campbell in Kansas City and Bailey & Harms in Champaign and get a decent honest price. Then he looked out of the window for a long time again and he finally turned around and he said, "Go ahead and do what you want." Right then I was fired but I did not know it. They did not tell me until one week before the school was over.

Now you see there was no tenure in Illinois, even though if it had been it would not have affected me. Now it was 1931. The depth of the

Depression. You could not buy a job. I had no money. The people came and got my furniture. I stood in the center of my living room and with my three year old daughter in my arms and cried like a baby. I never cried so hard in my life.

I had within my consciousness a great desire to make sure that teachers have tenure, that they can't get kicked around like that. That they do not have to tend an institute and join an organization in order to be there. I had no job, no money. My father sent me \$100 a month for eight months. However, in 1932 all of a sudden I got a job at Palatine, Illinois. I must tell you about that because that also was an impressive thing.

I drove from Charleston, Illinois which was one hundred and eighty miles to Palatine which is out in Cook County and all the way because anytime I had applied for a teaching job, the superintendent would always ask many, many questions. And, I wondered how I was going to tell this man that I had gotten fired? How was I going to tell him that I had not been teaching for nine months? Was worry to me. I borrowed \$25.00 because I did not have a decent suit of clothes. I went early and shopped in Chicago and bought a suit of clothes for \$25.00 and I was dressed up and felt good. I went out there met the principal his name was Dr. Butler. He said, "Megel glad to see you. I can't meet you right now but the Northwest Conference Coaches and Principals are having dinner at Barrington. We are going to leave here at six o'clock, if you want to go along I will take you and you could meet some of the people." I said, "Fine."

On the way over he said, "You came from Indiana. I have a son in Logansville." We talked about everything in the world not one thing was mentioned about what I had been, what I had done, how much money I wanted all those things that were always so important. We got to Barrington, it was only six miles away and went into the gymnasium and as we stepped into the door Dr. Butler said, "Oh, there is Smith he is the principal of Barrington." He said, "Smith come here." Mr. Smith came over and Butler said, "Mr. Smith, I want you to meet Carl Megel. He is taking Kinkaid's place in Palatine." Well, I tell you the emotion of going through the fore nothing I can ever remember was as emotional as that how bad I needed a job and remembering how I cried in Casey when I left there. I never forgot that.

However, what really happened as I came into the school that afternoon, the gentleman sitting at the desk said, "I am Harry Kinkaid. I am here and I am leaving on Monday and I am going to Crane High School in Chicago. And I said, "My god how did you get to Chicago?" And he said, "Because down state we all thought that you had to buy jobs." Which was true if you paid \$4,000 you would get a job at that time in Chicago maybe not so much there during the Depression but earlier. Anyway, he said, "I took the exam." And he said, "Why, are you interested?" I said, "Sure." He said, "I will get you permission." I took that exam in December and I was determined to pass it. It was difficult, very difficult. I want to tell you this because it affects us so much. I had to get the application then I had to take four subjects physics was my major and general science my minor, education which was the entire field of education, professional studies and professional subjects.

Well, I studied for three months every day because I was determined to pass that which I did. It was a gain a grade creative average of ninety-two that seemed to have stuck with me. Now, because this was Depression, I did not get assigned until 1935.

In 1897 Margaret Haley organized the Chicago Teachers Federation which was the first organization of its kind in the United States. Of course, the NEA had a federal charter that they got in 1857 which was issued by the Congress of the United States but they had not done very much. The reason that Margaret Haley organized elementary teachers in Chicago - most of these teachers were graduates of teachers college, had two years of college work and then got their certificate in teaching in Chicago - was that they had not received a salary increase for ten years. They were paid \$700.00 a year. Five thousand elementary teachers joined her organization. She began to ask for salary increases. The Board of Education said, "Oh, my we don't have any money. We know that you ought to have a salary increase."

However, Chicago was growing. The banks were full of money. It could have been done. So Margaret Haley started looking into the tax records and found the big corporations exactly as they are now were not paying any taxes. So she went and got pictures of these big corporations big factories and she went to the newspapers. We would like to print this story and these pictures. Oh, no we couldn't do that. So she bought space and put it in the paper. Well the little guys out there who bought a house for \$1,200.00 and were paying \$100 when a factory worth \$5 million was paying \$100.00 began to raise a fuss. So the Board of Education immediately found \$250.00 for a raise.

Margaret Haley's organization was just an independent organization. In 1902 she got her members in a meeting and she said, "Look the banks have not helped us, the board of education has not helped us, corporations have not helped us, civic associations haven't helped us the only people that helped us are the Federation of Labor. Chicago Federation of Labor has been our friend, therefore, I think we should join." She made an application and was accepted in October, 1902. As far as we know that is the first group of teachers who have joined a labor movement in the United States.

I came to Chicago on an assignment in March, 1935. From the information that you have you know that I have very little contact with any labor movement. The only experience that I had with the labor movement was when I was eight years old. At that time, there was the mail carrier from the mail trains B & O a quarter of a mile away to the post office which is in the little town of Hayden. And the railroad people were on strike because they wanted to have ice in their water bucket on the caboose. And a mail carrier Sammy Swathouse he talked to me and he said, "My goodness Carl isn't this terrible these crazy people striking this railroad for ice in their water bucket." Well, I did not know anything about anything, however a short time later my mother sent me to see my grandmother to visit over the weekend. It happened that the train came by and they put me on the caboose so I could ride in there and it was in the middle of the summer and it was so hot that I couldn't hardly stand it in that caboose. I thought that when I got in there this was a great thing riding in the caboose. My goodness, I understood there why those people were on strike even though I knew nothing about unions

and even when I came to Chicago with the background I had the only thing I had was some animosity against the Education Association for requiring my membership when I did not want to join. And this experience immediately as I got to Chicago, I found that they had four legitimate teacher unions. They had the Men Teachers Union, the Women's High School Teachers Union, Elementary Teachers Union and the Playground Teachers Union.

The Men Teachers immediately at Lake View High School where I was they wanted me to join. The membership fee was \$20.00. I went to Chicago at a salary of \$1,800.00 teaching six classes of science. And I said well, I cannot afford \$20.00 on my salary which was absolutely true. I had a wife and two kids and lived in a small apartment that I was paying \$50.00 for it was not as big as two of these rooms and just barely making it. And besides, I said, this is the important thing. I find that coming here the men are fighting the women, the women are fighting the men and the whole thing is a mess and that nothing can be accomplished. But once you merge and form one organization you can count me in. I didn't have any background in unionism except in that little incident I told you about, however, I saw the animosities that had been developed between the men and the women the high school versus the elementary to know good common sense that nowhere could they do anything. This was exactly what the Board of Education wanted.

However, during this 35, 36 period with the corrupt Kelly-Nash machine in Chicago, Kelly was the mayor and running the schools and they took over the schools and did everything to make money on the schools. The teachers finally gave up their animosity in order to form a strong organization. In the summer of 1937, a committee was formed to draw up a constitution for a

united group. In September, 1937 they were ready to hold a unity meeting. Jim Lotz, who was a Science teacher in Lake View High School with me came down he said, "Carl do you want to go to the meeting?" And I said, "I sure do" and he said, "Do you want to go with me?" And we went down together, we went early. It was held in the old auditorium which was built in 1896 in Chicago and was one of the best auditoriums in the country at that time. The acoustics were great for any plays or things that were held there.

Anyway, we sat on the first balcony right in the center. The first floor filled up, the first balcony, the second balcony way up to the fifth balcony 5,000 teachers were in that group that night. It was the biggest meeting of teachers that had ever been held in Chicago up until that time. The speakers mentioned the fact that we had a constitution moving and we were going to form a Chicago Teachers Union. John Fewkes was the temporary chairman and he said, "Now we are going to charge \$10.00 a year but there are so many of you that we can't keep a record of \$10.00 so pay \$5.00 now and in March we will collect the \$10.00 and get the records straight." So Jim said, "Carl what do you say?" And I said, "This is for me." He reached in his pocket and gave me a \$5.00 bill. He said, "Well here is my dues." I took his dues and my \$5.00 and I went back to Lake View. We had 159 teachers there and I picked up 72 more \$5.00 bills and 73 I guess it was because it was 75 \$375.00 I had.

The constitution that they had written said there shall be a House of Representatives which shall be the delegate body of the union and that each school will have one member representative for each 50 teachers. Because I

had gotten these people to sign up, they elected me to the House of Representatives. We had 159 teachers in Lake View High School 157 of those joined the Chicago Teachers Union at that time. May be some people have a part-time understanding why teachers would suddenly become so labor oriented? But you see, they had labor experience since 1902 when Margaret Haley affiliated with the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Chicago Federation of Labor had been the best friend the teachers had at any time. And, therefore a matter of affiliating with labor was significant moreover, Chicago was highly industrialized city and organized in the labor unions from way back. The Chicago Federation of Labor was one of the most powerful strongest labor organizations at that time in the country. Therefore, they had that background there was no problem with joining a union.

What had been done was that the corrupt Kelly-Nash machine the bear appointed the School Board and he appointed people that were representing the corporations and banks and did everything possible to prevent teachers from getting any money and to putting money in schools. They had a football game out at Soldiers Field which was between the two Catholic high schools and the Public high schools and the Board ordered every teacher to buy a ticket. Well the teachers rebelled and they did not buy those tickets. It happened that the opposition was so unanimous that the Board of Education did not do anything to the teachers.

The superintendent was appointed by the School Board who was the water boy for the School Board who was the water boy for the Kelly-Nash machine. For instance, each coach in all the high schools had a budget for athletic equipment. All of a sudden they did away with the budget and they had a

central buying service downtown. And same thing happened there that happened when I was down at Casey. All of a sudden the athletic equipment doubled in price which came out of each coaches budget in the various schools. They had candy in the schools which 24 bars for .5c was \$1.20 and they charged the schools .80c. All of a sudden that was raised .1c a bar. And where did that .1c a bar go? It went to somebody down there in the mayor's office or somewhere, we never did know. You know all the kids in Chicago bought a lot of candy and .1c bar was a lot of money.

The first meeting of the House of Representatives was in October, 1938 and was my first meeting. I went down with \$350.00 and I gave it to John Fewkes. It was the first time I met him. John had been made the president following the big meeting in September. He was just a delegate at that time but he was made president of the Chicago Teachers Union, Local Number 1 of the American Federation of Teachers which was an amalgamation of the Men Teachers Union, the Women High School Teachers Union, the Elementary Teachers Union and the Playground Teachers Union. There was a euphoria among the teachers about the fact that these people, as I said before had given up their animosities and had decided that to their own best interest they could organize into one union and accomplish for education and for themselves the benefits that were essential.

The Board of Education in 1933 had cut teachers salaries by changing the school year from ten months to nine months and reducing the rate of salaries by fifteen percent which meant twenty three and a half percent. This was a terrible terrible thing to do at that time. Moreover, they decided to do

away with the junior high schools and the shop classes. The Board had spent thousands and thousands of dollars on buying equipment for the shops which they had done. The various technical schools in Chicago, Crane High School was recognized as one of the greatest technical schools in the country. They took all the equipment away and reduced it to practically nothing. These were the things that teachers were mad about and these are the things that the union were determined to change. One of the first things that we did was to move to a ten month school year that would give the teachers a one month increase in salary and would be a great boon to schools in Chicago where pupils had nothing else to do but play in the streets. They would be in classes for another month and that would be an advantage to them in many many ways.

It took us a long long time because every avenue of Chicago - the cooperations everyone was bitterly opposed to the Chicago Teachers Union. These oppositions however, only helped to consolidate the members who were members of the Chicago Teachers Union. Now instead of fighting the high schools or the elementary, the men and the women, they began to fight the Board of Education which was what they should have been doing all along. Slowly, they began making progress. We finally got back one month and that was a big help. Then we got a raise here and there. All this time however, John Fewkes, the president and the rest of us were under tremendous opposition of all kinds. We tried to hold a meeting. The School Board would not allow us to put the literature in the school mailboxes. We had to fight to get that. We had to fight to have our meetings in the schools. We had to fight for everything that we got and a slow slow but gradually then we worked for a better Board of Education. And finally, the superintendent resigned.

We got Dr. Harold Hunt from Kansas City. I got so well acquainted with Dr. Hunt, he was a terrific man and a great superintendent. He had been told that his main objective he should have was to destroy the Chicago Teachers Union. In a way he tried it, but he didn't succeed very well because we were organized and wouldn't let him move one way or the other. He appreciated that and he knew that we were working for better schools in the City of Chicago which also was his objective and, therefore we got along fine. Later on when I was vice-president, I used to go in and talk to him and he and I had great respect and I had great respect for him.

The membership of the Chicago Teachers Union soon became a majority and later on even up to seventy-five and eighty percent. It was this unity that gave us strength as we have always said, there is strength in unity. We tried, John Fewkes did to get a meeting with the Board of Education. We never could do that they would not meet with us. However, the Chicago Federation of Labor under the direction of John Fitzpatrick called up the Mayor and said, "We wanted the Teachers Union to meet with the superintendent." We finally got that meeting with the Board of Education.

The president of the Board of Education was a gentleman whose only purpose in being on the Board was to sell coal to the Board of Education because he was in the coal business. I have never known in all the time that I was in Chicago, a Board member - there were nine members on the Board - I never knew one Board member who had children in the public schools of Chicago. They were all there for ulterior purposes this is why we had so

much difficulty. Finally however, we got a meeting with the Board of Education. The first meeting, I was not there but John Fewkes reported to us that the president sat up there like a little kaiser and said, "all right" and John would say we want this and, "all right what else." We want to have the right to have our mail put in the boxes, we want a salary increase, "all right," no discussion. After he gave everything that we wanted to talk about the Board president said, "Thank you very much the meeting is adjourned." That is the way we had to fight to get everything and we finally got it. It was a terrible thing. If we had not of had a strong united union we could never have done it.

Now you may wonder exactly how we accomplished all these things. I said it was because of the unity of the members but we worked very hard in organizing the community. We got active in the Chicago City Club. We got active in the Save Our Schools Committee (SOS), this was organized by the people interested in education in the community. The corruption within the mayor's office, the corruption within the school board was so evident that the decent honest citizens of Chicago finally were able to defeat Mayor Kelly and elect Mayor Kennely. Great changes were made within a very short time after Mayor Kennely come in although he still headed a Board of Education that wasn't as good as it could be. One of the changes that he made was that he said that he would appoint which he did outstanding leaders in Chicago. Twenty of them to serve as an advisory committee to recommend two people for each vacancy on the Board of Education and he would then pick one of them.

Now these were all of the committees, most of these committees were favorable to the Chicago Teachers Union. Of course, the Chicago Federation

was there, the Civic Federation and all these people were there and so that was another way we were able to gain the things that we needed. Our organization, the Chicago Teachers Union had quite a background. You see down in the 30's because the Board of Education was so corrupt and because the Depression was so severe, nobody paid taxes and teachers went without salary. At one time the Board of Education owed the teachers \$32 million in back pay. In order to advertise this, they organized voluntary committees. This was in the 30's, 31, 32, 33 and 34 when I was still in Palatine, and I walked down with them once or twice.

They would come down Michigan Boulevard as many as 5,000 teachers. They were divided into four groups with a leader in each group and only the leader knew where they were going. And pretty soon the first leader would say, all right we turn here and he would go to the Board of Education with his group. Another group would go somewhere else. One of these groups was headed by John Fewkes. He was just a teacher at Tilden High School. He had four boys and he needed money badly. He went to one of the banks in Chicago and he asked to see the president.

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CARL MEGEL INTERVIEW

October 26, 1986

Tape 2

John Fewkes took his group to one of the banks in Chicago. Now, I was teaching at Palatine at that time and I know we had this report in the paper and how effective it was even to me that far away. What he did he asked for the president and they said he is busy. And he said, "Where is he?" And they said, "right there." John walked over to the door and it was locked. It had a glass however, so he picked up a chair and broke the glass and opened the door and walked in. And the president shook his finger at him and said, "If you teachers," and this was written in the papers that I read, "If you teachers don't stop this it is going to be blood on the streets of Chicago of teachers." And John said, "If you bankers think you can sit on top of your pot of gold here on these banks and not listen to the teachers then you are just crazy." That was the thing that electrified teachers in a matter that I don't know how else it gave them the inspiration and the idea that unity would be valuable.

Now this was the first experience that I had in connection with John Fewkes and the leadership that he was giving to this group until I heard him speak at the meeting in September, 1937. As president he was a dynamic

leader. He was very capable on the floor as a speaker. And, he could motivate a group as no one that I had known up to that time. This was his power of leadership and was so valuable to the Chicago Teachers Union. And, more than that he was tireless in his efforts to build a good strong union which he did. We soon became the majority union and had control of the teachers in Chicago. The Federation of which Margaret Haley was a member never did join the Chicago Teachers Union which was too bad. I never did know exactly why. You know she was a member of the first American Federation of Teachers group in 1916 but she withdrew in 1917. And so, I have an idea that she was a little irritated that she was not made president of the American Federation of Teachers instead of Charlie Stillman but, I don't know.

The AFT grew from 1916 from 2,969 members to 10,000 in 1920. Now after the war an anti-union campaign was put on exactly like what is being put on in this time since 1980. The firing of the Airline Controllers was indication that this Reagan administration was anti-union as it has been ever since. It was like that in 1920 when Republicans took over with Harding. Anti-unions were received with great opposition all the way down the line. The AFL dropped to 3.5 million members. The AFT dropped to a very few members. In fact, Mary Barker was elected president in 1925 and she moved the office to a room in her home down in Atlanta and donated \$3,000 otherwise, the AFT would have died. And after a year or two there, she got the movement again and however, the AFT did not grow very much until 1937-1938 when the Chicago Teachers Union with 10,000 members came into the convention.

In 1938, it was my privilege to be elected delegate to the AFT Convention which was held in Cedar Point, Ohio. The New York delegation was well united but it was not very large. The influence of the Chicago Teachers Union began to be felt immediately in 1938 and began to grow from that time on so membership in the Chicago Teachers Union increased. The reason was that the National AFT was a powerless organization. It had membership but the dues were so low that they could not do much and did not have any influence. The presidents were not on full-time but the strong unions like the Chicago Teachers Union did have influence within their own local and because we were interested in Illinois, we organized a teachers of Illinois. At that time we only had five other locals in the state of Illinois. AFT was a very weak organization in those days and it was the unions particularly the Chicago Teachers Union that became the focal point of influence in education in the United States.

My membership, I was a member of the House of Representatives as a high school functional vice-president. Then I was made chairman of the Salary Committee which I held for fourteen years. This was very valuable experience and I know one of them would have so little money to work with. One year Art Walls, who was our treasurer and I spent our entire two weeks Christmas vacation working out a presentation which I was to make to the Board of Education on the 16th January. And, we came to the conclusion that there was such a small amount of money, we would give all of it to the elementary teachers. The reason for this was that in the very beginning, the elementary teachers were teaching five hours a day and the high school teachers were six

hours. Therefore, the elementary teachers were paid less money than the high school teachers and with the reductions that had been made in the 1930's, they were still at a very low rate. We found that we could give the elementary teachers \$125.00 raise if the high school teachers would forego a raise.

We had a big meeting of the high school teachers and they almost unanimously agreed that they would do that. They said that if you split it up it would be such a small amount, it does not mean anything so give the elementary teachers that much. This was a great thing that we did because it unified, it brought in the elementary teachers to a better degree than they had been before. It was still that animosity between the high school and the elementary and it was done because of the salary. Well I went through the budget which was bigger than your telephone book and prepared a presentation to the Board of Education and especially in 1951 when Dr. Hunt was there. He complimented me on my presentation and we made a request because teachers had gotten a percentage raise, it meant that the teachers at the top got more money than the teachers at the bottom and the bottom teachers complained about that. So, therefore I proposed a salary increase of \$200.00 flat across-the-board for everybody and eight percent after that. Well everybody was satisfied with that and Dr. Hunt helped us get it and that was the highest salary increase we had gotten up to that time. That was 1951.

As a result of that I was elected vice-president, full time vice-president of the Chicago Teachers Union in the election. In the meantime, I was elected to the Pension Board which was also a very important thing because up to this time the Chicago teacher did not have very many

members on the Board. And, I was one of the first teacher members on the board. The Chicago Pension had a long history. In fact Margaret Haley organized a small pension in the 1890's and it continued and then, of course, the pension system in Chicago was a Chicago Pension system. The Board of the LFI had a pension system but the Chicago Teachers were under their own Pension Board. The Board was consistant of, and this had been set up in state law consisted of six teachers elected by the teachers and three members of the Board of Education. This Board determined the investment of the funds and efforts to secure additional funds for operation of the Pension Fund.

The Board of Education had to set aside certain money out of their budget for funding the Chicago Teachers Union pension. The Pension Board met once a month. They had hired an outstanding gentleman who was an expert on pensions, funding and investment. He advised us on many of these issues so that we had a sound pension. Probably today, it is one of the soundest penison systems there is because of the investments and the money they have in the Pension Board. Even during the Depression the pension of teachers had never missed a pay day. They never missed even though teachers missed their salary the Pension Board paid off to the retired teachers all they had coming all during those years because of the soundness of the Chicago Teachers Pension Fund.

You know labor unions had a hard time in this time in this nation until the Roosevelt administration in 1934 passed the Labor Relations Act. This gives the right of people to join organizations of their choice or of their crafts or trades and with the right to collective bargaining with their

employers. However, teachers were not included in this Act. Senator Lehman of New York was the chairman of the committee that brought in the Labor Act. It had in there Craft Unions and Professional Unions. The Education Association from New York came down and said, "Look, we don't want any part of this we are professionals. We do not want any part of this labor movement." So Mr. Lehman said, "All right you don't have to have it." And he took it out and it said, "Except teachers." And, therefore teachers were not in the Labor Act and it worked for a long time. Even now we don't have a clear definition of the position of professional employees like teachers in the labor movement. Therefore in Chicago we were a little handicapped in trying to get collective bargaining with the Board of Education.

When I became president in 1952, I spoke in 1953 to the teachers of the West Suburban Teachers Union which had gone in 1938 through great difficulty when they fired two teachers and negotiated a contract. There was no election but they negotiated a contract. I thought this would be the group that I could talk about because I noticed when I became president that this was the thing that we had to do if we were going to do anything. And so, I made my entire address on Collective Bargaining. I noticed that the audience of about 500 teachers there were very quiet and I thought my, I must be getting through to these people. When I finished, they swarmed up to my desk and they said, "Megel, what are you doing to us? That is labor, we don't want labor we are professionals."

You see that idea of professionalism had been deliberately inculcated in the minds of teachers. Oh, you're better than these blue overall workers.

The Education Association promoted that all the time. Even in the

colleges and universities the students who were becoming teachers were told, well you might join the professional group, that is your duty. But, of course, you all may have that blue collar outfit if you want to join ditchdiggers and garbage collectors, why that is where you go. That is the way they were conditioned. Therefore, by this time, to become a member of a teachers union it was a tremendous step forward much less entering into the tried and true technique of collective bargaining which the labor movement had found useful and helpful and which it had been helped by the National Labor Relations Act of 1934. It took them all these years to come to this point and therefore teachers were not interested in collective bargaining. We had to do a lot of educating. I understood that when they told me that they were professionals, I knew exactly what they had meant and I knew how much work we had to do to finally get them to be members of a collective bargaining unit.

Immediately following this, I made a serious effort whenever I spoke to a new local to tell them that our program was a program for advancement of the principles of education. We had to get those through collective bargaining and the techniques were to secure from the Board of Education the right for an election by the teachers to determine the bargaining agent and this organization that won the election would have the right and the Board of Education would have indicated this before the election that they could then meet with the Board of Education and negotiate a contract in writing. That was the program that we started out in 1953 and followed through until 1957 when we got the first one.

Now my purpose in joining the Chicago Teachers Union was to build a union strong enough to provide for the teachers of Chicago. I had a little

interest in any other area to build a union strong enough to secure salary and working conditions for teachers in Chicago so that we could have the finest school system in the United States. We wanted a salary that was able to keep us alive. I had a wife and two children and I needed enough money to live, I did not want to be a millionaire, but enough to live comfortably in the city of Chicago. I wanted to have a small class size so that I could do an excellent job teaching and this would be true for all teachers in Chicago. We had about 15,000 teachers in Chicago at that time and to provide that kind of a program that is what I was interested in. That is why I was so active in the Chicago Teachers Union and why I participated week in and week out in 1937 to 1951 when I was elected by the members as the Vice-President of the Chicago Teachers Union, the first full-time Vice-President the Chicago Teachers Union had.

When I became Vice-President of the Chicago Teachers Union and in 1951 had been going to the AFT Convention since 1938, for the first time I began to feel that I had a duty to take an active part in the American Federation of Teachers. The result was that when I came to the convention in 1951 we found that our caucus was a little short on membership. Now, I want to talk a little bit about the caucuses here because it is so important at that time. When the AFT was organized in 1916, there were no caucuses, however, as I said there were the four unions in Chicago. These were individual unions with their own officers and their own local number. Number one was the Men Teachers Union, number two was the Women High School Teachers and so on down the line.

Freeland Stecker of the Men, well let's go back. Charles Stillman, President of the Men Teachers Union was elected President of the American Federation of Teachers in 1916. He was a shop teacher at Crane High School and out there was a nucleus of the Men Teachers Union and the leading forces. Stecker was also there, Freeland Stecker and he was elected Secretary-Treasurer. At that time the conventions were held each year and the officers were elected each year. In 1925, all of a sudden when the convention met there developed opposition to Mr. Stecker. This was led by the Chicago High School Women and Mr. Stecker was defeated by a lady who was the President of the High School Women in Chicago. Now the locals that supported this idea were the locals who subsequently became the Progressive Caucus of the American Federation of Teachers.

St. Paul Women because in St. Paul we had a Women's local and a Men's local we also had it in Minneapolis a Women's local and a Men's local. St. Paul Women, there was a small local in Detroit, New York, Washington, D.C. which largely were women and these were the ones who supported for Secretary-Treasurer the President of Women High School Teachers in Chicago. This of course then was the basis of the formation of the caucuses and it existed until most recently when the membership consolidated in 1964. I mention that a little later. In order to protect themselves, the Men Teachers in Chicago worked together with Gary, Indiana, Ohio and Cleveland and a few other people and that was the basis of the formation of the National Caucus eventually. But you see that caused animosity between the Men and the Women in Chicago which was the reason why the Chicago Unions were

so ineffective until the merger in 1937. It took that long from 1925 to affect the merger.

The caucuses continued not to the advantage of the AFT. In most ways they were detrimental to the progress of AFT because it was a matter of feuding between the two caucuses and there developed a great deal of animosity between the leaders of the larger locals within the caucuses. These were evident at the convention and set up the candidates and programs very much like the Democrats and Republicans. We had that same idea. It was not to the benefit of the organization. It was because of this caucus situation that after I had been elected Vice-President of the Chicago Teachers Union, I was determined to become more active at the National scene.

In 1951, we went to Grand Rapids, Michigan for the convention running for president was the farthest from my mind. I came on Saturday, I was on the Steering Committee we had seventeen people on the Steering Committee for the National Caucus. The National Caucus because of the politics of the organization as a result of the caucuses could not find fifteen people to run for Vice-President. There were fifteen people on the Council at that time. The reason was because of the feuding between the National Caucus and the Progressive Caucus. There were not too many locals who had been affiliated either one way or the other. And, because Chicago, Gary, Toledo and Cleveland had enough votes to maintain itself made little effort to expand the membership in the caucus.

You see the caucuses were regional in nature. The major membership of the Progressive Caucus was New York, Philadelphia and Detroit and the major

membership of the National Caucus was Chicago, Indiana, Gary, Ohio and Cleveland. Now you see here you have also a little difference because the National Caucus was rural in nature whereas the Progressive Caucus was city orientation. Why wasn't Chicago also? But you see the Chicago people many of the Chicago teachers were rural people like I was and therefore we had that rural influence and that made some differences in the caucus.

When I came into Grand Rapids in 1951 the National Caucus had considerable influence and had a sufficient vote. After Dr. Counts retired in 1942, he recommended John Fewkes as his successor. John was elected without much opposition in 1942, however, shortly thereafter he was named to the National War Labor Board then he had to come to Washington. Therefore, the AFT was without a president in fact for eight or nine months. However, in 1943 at the convention, Joe Landis was elected president. Joe Landis is from Cleveland, the second largest local at that time and did a very fine job for five years. Membership increased each single year. At the Convention in 1946 in St. Paul two young men came in from Colorado. We had no membership much membership in Colorado but they came in and that was Herrick Roth and John Eckland. They joined the National Caucus. We were glad to have them and were glad to have that new blood from Colorado.

In 1947 we were at Boston for the Convention and we brought in John Eckland as AFT Vice-President in the National Caucus. I was elected Chairman of the Caucus at that time and, I came to the next convention which was Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Now you need to know something else about the structure of the caucus. It was not necessarily the caucus it was the way the votes were distributed because the small locals wanted some voice in the

organization because the majority of the locals were small locals. The votes at the convention were distributed according to membership. You got one vote for 25 members or less up to 500. Then you got 1 vote for 50 members up to 1,000. Then you got 1 vote for 100 members beyond that. Well that meant that Chicago which previously had four locals with 29 in 1937 when we formed the union gained 9,000 members in four months and became the largest local with some power but now no votes at the convention.

At this time when we went to Glenwood Springs in 1948, I was chairman of the caucus. I met John Eckland out in the hall and I said, "John the caucus is meeting this Sunday night at eight o'clock in the Chestnut Room and I hope you will be there." I had no idea of anything. The Progressive Caucus was also meeting and I was surprised that John Eckland did not show up. As soon as the meeting was over, we nominated Joe Landis for president and we were working on the list of vice-presidents that we were going to support. As the caucus adjourned I stepped in the hall and there I saw John Eckland and I said to him, "John, I missed you at the caucus." And he said, "A man has to do what he has to do." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I am going to run for president in the Progressive Caucus."

You need to understand that John Eckland at sometime either that convention or a succeeding one could have been a candidate for president on the National Caucus slate. However, since he chose of his own accord to seek office before we were ready to nominate him, he switched caucuses to do so and we were not very happy about it. However, he got elected at that convention. The Progressive Caucus was a struggling caucus and had no candidate that they were interested in nominating. Besides, I would not be

surprised if some of them thought may be it would be all right to nominate John if he got defeated it would not hurt the rest of them. But anyhow at the election John Eckland was elected president. He defeated Joe Landis. This was a great blow to us. It was especially a great blow because we in the National Caucus had promoted John Eckland 1946-47. We put him on the Council of the American Federation of Teachers elected on the slate of the National Caucus and, of course, that left a great deal of animosity on the part of many of us in the National Caucus.

This is the way the situation was when we came to the convention in 1951 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I came in on Saturday and we had a Caucus Steering Committee meeting on Saturday evening and we began to talk about candidates. We did not have any candidate for President in mind. We did think about vice-presidents. We met on Saturday night, Sunday night, Monday night and now it was Tuesday at two o'clock in the morning we were only a few hours from nomination at five o'clock on Wednesday when the election was at five o'clock. Here we were in the Steering Committee seventeen people and finally the Chairman Ed Jones from Cleveland said, "All right now, we have got to make up our mind who we are going to run for president." Somebody over at the far side of the table, I was sitting by the door kind of a door watchman, and somebody over there said, "I think we ought to try to nominate Joe again if he wants to run" and Ed said, "All right, I will go find out." He called him up and Joe said, "Well if they want to support me, yes I will run."

So it went around the table. Each of them sixteen people said, "All right I will support Joe Landis. It came to me. I got up and I said now I

would not have done that had I not been AFT vice-president but I did it this time because I felt that I had now a position in the AFT that should be recognized. And I said, "I am sorry but I cannot support that idea." Joe Landis was president of the American Federation of Teachers for five years and did an excellent job. He got beaten in Denver, Colorado in 1948. We nominated him in 1950 in Detroit he got beaten again. If you nominate him tomorrow, he is going to get beaten again and I don't think that is the way to treat a former president of the American Federation of Teachers."

And somebody very snidely said, "All right then why don't you take it?" And I said, "In the same manner that you have made that statement, I will accept, but I can tell you now I said that Joe Landis could not be elected tomorrow and neither can I be elected tomorrow. But if this caucus does not have room for new blood then they have no reason for existing." And they said, "Oh Megel you are wrong we got the votes we are going to win by 200." I said, "Tomorrow I will get 384 votes. It takes 460 to get elected tomorrow. If you can find me 75 votes between now and tomorrow at five o'clock, I can get elected." When the votes were counted Eckland got 625 and I got 384. My estimate was just one vote wrong and that one vote came from my own local in Chicago which embarrassed me. I would of had it exactly right otherwise. That as far as I was concerned would end any effort of mine to become president of the A.F. of T.

However, Thursday morning there was a resolution on the floor of the convention asking the AFT to support Loyalty Oaths for Teachers. Joe Landis got up - well before I say this, let me tell you about the Chicago Teachers Union. John Fewkes was our president and he was excellent in presenting the

statements of position on the floor of the convention. He was very nice looking, he had a good voice and he spoke in an excellent fashion. Terry McGovern, Walter Werry, Danny Green and about eight or ten of us in the Chicago Teachers Union had decided that we would let John Fewkes be our spokesman. However, we would decide issues and tell John what we had agreed to support, and then John would make the presentation to the floor. The result was that I had never been on the floor of the convention all these years nor had any of these other people.

When this resolution came up to support Loyalth Oaths for Teachers, Joe Landis got up and he said in very sincere voice and vote that I hope this good great organization can support this resolution because I have no objection to standing here before you and pledging allegiance to this great flag, and he motioned towards the flag and the longer he talked the more irritated I got. And because I had been a candidate the day before, I thought well all right this is a chance for me to say a few words so I got right up and asked for the floor and John Eckland said, "Oh, here is Carl Megel. Now this is the man who ran for president yesterday." I kind of took it as a little jab in the back because he beat me so bad. However, I got up and I said that I am sorry to disagree with my good friend Joe Landis but on this issue I do have to disagree with him because I have been a teacher for thirty years and for anyone now to require me to sign a Loyalty Oath it inpunes my integrity and my loyalty and under no conditions could I support the idea of a Loyalty Oath for teachers.

The motion was then lost and I was pleased with the vote. Just at that time the convention was recessed for lunch. As I got up to walk to the door

at least twenty people swarmed around me and they said, "Congratulations on that speech. We did not know that the Megel on that ballot yesterday was you. We have seen you around here but we did not know that your name was Megel." This was because only John Fewkes had appeared before the convention and therefore he was well known but the rest of us weren't. We were there but we were not so well known. I thought then well may be that gives me a suggestion. When I got back to the Chicago Teachers Union office, I got a list of all of the delegates who were at the convention and each month I wrote a letter to each one of them in which I said that I am reporting to you activities of the Chicago Teachers Union. We did so and so in Organization. We did so and so in negotiating with the School Board. All these kind of things so that when we came to the convention in 1952 this time I was well known by all the delegates that were there.

I was nominated by the National Caucus and I was elected by I believe 29 votes. John Eckland could not believe it. He said, "Well life is full of surprises." But he said, "I think may be you should hear from the new president." So I got up and I said that I recognized that there are many here who could be better qualified to be president of the A.F. of T. However, that I yield to no one in my dedication of the ideals of the American Federation of Teachers and that I could not understand why an organization that is 36 years old has only 39,000 members when there is a million and a half teachers to organize and that I was going to tell you now that my major goal would be membership and putting you on record now we are going to shoot for 100,000. And I began whispering out there. We only had 280 delegates at the convention and I knew what they were saying that this crazy guy is we can't even get 50,000 much less 100,000. However, by putting

on the campaign that I put on for twelve years by the time I left the office in 1964 we had 100,109 members.

The convention of 1952 adjourned at two o'clock on Friday and three o'clock we had a Council meeting. I was the new president and I was leading this Council meeting for the first time. In March 1952 the teachers at Providence, Rhode Island went on strike. They asked for \$650.00. The Board offered \$250.00 and there they stuck. Finally, the Board says, "All right come on back and we will talk." So the teachers went back and they said, "All right we want to talk." And the Board said, "\$250.00." They said, "They wanted to talk." And the Board said, "We are talking that is it \$250.00." So then they could not get anywhere so they decided they would go back and not take a strike again during this Spring year, but in the Fall they would settle this before they went back.

Sophie Camel who was the president of the Providence local came to the Council and she said that we are having these problems in Providence and the School Board is having a meeting on Wednesday of next week and we want the new president to come and make a presentation. So the Council voted that I go to Providence and make a presentation to the Board. The Council meeting adjourned at noon on Sunday and at 2:00 p.m., I was on a plane to Providence. Now, I had never been farther east than Syracuse, New York although I had been in New York City once to attend a meeting of the United Nations Association up to this time.

So coming into Providence I was brand new. However, I met with Sophie Camel and the officers of the local all day Monday, all day Tuesday and

partly Wednesday. Now, because I had been chairman of the Salary Committee for the Chicago Teachers Union, I knew how to read a Budget. I know how to make a presentation to the Board. Just a few months before that a presentation that I made and discussion with the Superintendent Dr. Harold Hunt, who was a terrific gentleman, we were able to get a \$200.00 across-the-board raise and on top of that an eight percent increase which was the finest increase that the Chicago Teachers had ever gotten up to this time. So I understood many of these things, however coming into Providence everything was new and different. However, the local did have many figures and so I made a proposal and we had a meeting of the teachers on Tuesday evening and I presented this proposal to them and they agreed to it.

We went to the meeting on Wednesday evening. It must have been 200 people in the audience. Most of them were teachers who came to see what was going to happen because they were concerned about this salary situation. Nine men on the Board, they called a School Committee in the East. Sophie Camel introduced me and I got up and I said, "Well gentlemen," first I said to the president, "Mr. President there are a lot of people here, I think maybe we might do better if we could meet in Executive Session." He had his back to me and he turned to me and practically screamed and he said, "You can meet here." I said, "All right." At that time three gentlemen on that committee turned their backs to me. Just turned their chairs around completely. Well this was a new situation. Here I was a new President of the American Federation of Teachers, a Chicago High School teacher who had come from the farms of Indiana being greeted with this kind of treatment was unknown to me in many ways the first time I had been to Providence.

So I changed my statement, I said, "Now gentlemen I came from the farms of Indiana. When I was teaching down there the teachers used to talk about Providence and what a wonderful school system you had and how we would love to teach in Providence. But I am awfully sorry to tell you gentlemen down in Indiana the teachers don't talk like that today and the reason is that you do not have that kind of a school system anymore. But now I also want to tell you that it isn't your fault," one of the guys turned around. Then I said, "Now the teachers have asked for \$650.00 that is ridiculous because you just don't have that money you can't pay that much," the other two turned around. Now I was in a better mood and better shape. "However, you have offered \$250.00 that is also ridiculous because you can do better." And then I had a chart four charts in fact, the main one was a chart that I had on the funds. I showed exactly how much money they had coming in, I showed how much they would be paying in to teachers salaries this year. I also said, "You are going to need ten new teachers and you are paying an average of \$3,000 therefore you need \$30,000 for the new teachers that you are going to bring in. However, all this adds up and it shows that you can pay these teachers \$440.00 and the teachers have already had a meeting and agreed that they would accept that settlement," and went on to tell them some more things.

Immediately Mr. Foley, who is the business agent for the Board he said, "Mr. Megel how did you get that we need ten teachers?" I said, "I went down to the birth records and I found that you are going to get 300 more boys and girls in your school this year than you had last year. At the salary that you are paying, you had about 30 children to a class and therefore you are going to need ten teachers." And he said, "That is remarkable because that is exactly the figure I have in my budget proposal." That was a good straw

in the wind for me and it gave us a good boost. Finally, after we talked awhile one of the Board members said, "Mr. Megel how long are you going to be here?" I said, "I can stay as long as it takes to get this thing settled because we are very interested in having the kids back in school and the teachers teaching in their jobs." He said, "Can you meet with Mr. Foley tomorrow and work this out?" I said, "If you give Mr. Foley authority that if we agree on something the Board will accept it." "I move that we do exactly that." "All right!"

The next day I met with Mr. Foley, not only did we get the \$440.00 but I said, "You know many school systems have lanes." He said, "What do you mean by lanes?" I said, "Well we are going to give them \$440.00 for AB but the people who have Masters, they have Masters plus thirty, they have Doctorate Degrees, they need a little more compensation." "How much?" I said, "May be \$250.00." "That is fine." So we got three lanes of \$250.00 each. And it happened during the discussion that we talked about sick leave and I found out that here in Providence in 1952 did not have a bit of sick leave for their teachers. What a disgraceful thing. So we talked about sick leave. We got 120 days sick leave. Well all this was written up in a contract which was signed by the teachers and by the Board that contract was in existence for practically ten years. They had a peace and harmony in Providence for nearly ten years and it was a great feather in my cap and I came back to the National office and wrote this story and sent it out to all the AFT locals and right away my prestige was on the way up.

When I came back to the National office, I wrote to the locals and told them this was the procedure we were promoting to move towards collective

bargaining for the locals. We were still a long way off but it was a beginning. In promoting the membership, I immediately sat down and took the membership of each local and set a quota for each local. I sent that to the local and I told them this is going to be your quota for this year. And at the convention in 1953 anybody who made their quota would receive a citation award and that we wanted to be sure that they had a delegate there to receive that award. Now there were two objects in this. I told you that the locals at Syracuse in 1952 had only about 280 members. This was a way to promote attendance at the convention. We increased our delegate strength at the 1953 Convention by at least 100 members. They came to get that citation therefore we had a dual purpose to increase the attendance at the Convention and also to promote membership.

Later on, I had occasion to visit many other locals. But I said at conventions my campaign against John Eckland was, "Why did we stop growing? Elect Megel and we will grow." Well that was quite a charge that I made and I thought that some way I had to fulfill it. Now how was I going to go about organizing teachers? I had no special techniques? However, I thought about if I was going to get members that I had to talk to teachers. So I called Ann Maloney in October 1952 and I said, "Ann can you get a list of locals in Indiana that you could set up meetings for me?" She said, "I will try." About a week or ten days later, she said, "Can you go next week?" And I said, "Sure." She said, "I got every day lined up for you." I said, "Oh, great."

So here was the schedule. Monday-Gary, Tuesday-South Bend, Wednesday-Fort Wayne, Thursday-Anderson, Friday-Indianapolis, Saturday-Terre

Haute, Indiana which is almost 200 miles from Chicago and I drove back home after that meeting and got home about three o'clock in the morning. That was my schedule.

I was surprised, these were all dinner meetings. You could get a good dinner meeting at that time for \$1.50 or \$2.00. The teachers did come. But even in Indiana, the teachers kind of came in with their heads down and looked around to see who was there. They were actually afraid to come to that meeting and I would say to them, "Why are you afraid? Stand tall, be proud you are members of one of the great organizations in the A.F. of T., the American Federation of Teachers affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Let's work for progress, let's work for teachers, let's work for salaries and mainly let's work for membership. Membership is the lifeblood of your organization. Increased membership gets your members to do a job. It gives you more money to do that job and I have given you a quota. I ask you to get out and work. All you have to do is talk to people. Talk to teachers. Talk to them and tell them look join the A.F. of T., we are all together on this and by doing so, we were able to get some enthusiasm."

After I got home, the next week I wrote a letter to the president, secretary and treasurer of each local and I told them how pleased I was to be there. What a wonderful local they had and what kind of progress they are going to make. How proud I am going to be of what they are going to be able to do. They do not realize yet how effective they can be, if they get enough members to do the job. It is going to take that, this is the kind of a campaign that they put on.

The teachers were very impressed because they thought here was an organization for the first time, they had seen the President of the A.F. of T. If the President who was a leader of the Chicago Teachers Union of which they knew, and knew what great progress they had made could do these things, they also could. And, of course, with my enthusiasm and my building up their ego their progress was quite significant in Indiana.

Now I did that also in Illinois. I went down to Southern Illinois. We had a Vice-President down there and he set up a series of meetings and I spent a whole week in Belleville, East St. Louis, Murphysboro, East Frankfort, all those places down there and did the very same thing and it began to work very well.

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CARL MEGEL INTERVIEW

October 27, 1986

Tape 3

As I began to think about my meeting in the six Indiana locals, of course Indiana being my home state was like going back home. I recognized that advertising and bringing the A.F. of T. to the locals was a big event to them because they had never heard the President of the A.F. of T. in their own local. Now may be the labor part of the A.F. of T. membership was not of such importance at that moment because I remember so well how amazed I was in October, 1932 when I went to the AFL Convention in New York.

This was my first AFL Convention. I was not acquainted with anyone. At the convention of the AFL each International sits at a table and usually the president sits at the head of the table. I made it a point to go around and speak to the president of each of these Internationals. I walked up and I said, "I want to say hello to the president. I am Carl Megel the new president of the American Federation of Teachers." I was amazed at how many of those presidents said, "Oh my goodness you mean the teachers got an AFL union my goodness." Here we had been in the AFL for 36 years and the presidents of these Internationals did not even know it. I recognized

immediately that it took a lot of work on our part and that somebody had not been doing any work.

This is what I thought because we had been in existence for 36 years. We had 11 presidents who had preceded me. What did they do all this time? I got busy immediately when I got back and wrote to the president of every International. I wrote a letter to the president of the State Federation of Labor and told them that I wanted them to know that I was the new president of the A.F. of T. and that I wanted to have close contact with them. I wanted to thank them for the effort they had made in helping the A.F. of T. grow and that I wanted them to help us try to organize new teachers in their areas. It is amazing that this had to be done but it was because I knew how much help the Chicago Federation of Labor had given to the Chicago Teachers Union. John Fitzpatrick, who was a longtime president and William Hurstein, who was a leader in the Chicago Teachers Union and a member of the college faculty in Chicago. College teachers were members of the A.F. of T. in Chicago at that time and he was on the Executive Board and had a lot of influence.

And, as I told you before even in 1902 when Margaret Haley said to her members, "We have had no help from anybody but labor and John Fitzpatrick and the Chicago Federation of Labor was giving us so much help that we should join." Therefore, I was well aware of what labor had done in Chicago but I was well aware of what labor could do for the A.F. of T. I also immediately began to urge at every meeting that I spoke to teachers to get into the Central Labor Body, get into the State Federation of Labor. Become active in

these organizations because when I did talk to some of the labor people as I did all over, they would say, "Hell Carl, we never see the teachers until they want something. If they want a salary increase they come to us, otherwise we never see them." Therefore if you want the help that you expect you have got to get out and participate in their program. And what they do, if you are able to help the little guy who is out there plugging away in his job and he has to go on strike join that picket line, give them some help.

We promoted the idea of teachers participating in the labor movement constantly. It took a little while but gradually they became interested to join. We had to also get the labor movement to understand their interest in education. You see teachers were educated people. Many of the labor people were educated but they had also been in schools where some teacher was in control and they had a little scepticism about teachers joining their own organization. Therefore, they had to be brought into understanding that the teachers were interested in their issues as well. I talked to a teacher in Chicago this was, I said, "How would you like to join the AFT of the Chicago Teachers Union?" She said, "Oh my dad is a union man and I will talk to him and I will talk to you tomorrow."

I called her the next day and she said, "Oh Mr. Megel, I talked to my father he said, "Oh no, I don't want you to join a labor union I didn't raise you up to become a labor person." You see this is the kind of an attitude we had to overcome. It was a tremendous handicap. It was one of the reasons why we had not grown and we had to overcome it. Shortly after that I spoke to the Illinois Federation of Labor convention and I said to them because I

had remembered this story. I said, "You men of labor you want a school made by a union man. You want a hat made by a union laborer. You want your suit made by union labor. You want your automobile made by union labor. Then why wouldn't you want your children taught by union teachers?"

It shocked them a little bit, but it was effective. Because of the successes that I had in Indiana and Illinois, I decided to go to California. I asked our vice-president to set me up some meetings. I went to California and met with the small local in Los Angeles. Now this local was a new Local 1021 which was set up in 1950 because in 1940, the AFT convention held in Milwaukee removed Local 430 which was the old Los Angeles local because of communistic activities. Therefore this local and what happened so often going from way out in left field the new local went to the right and was such a conservative local that it had problems too.

I went to see the president as I always did of the Central Labor Body, a very dynamic man who had 600,000 members in his Central Labor Body and our local in Los Angeles had 160 members. And when I walked in he was very cruel. He would not even talk to me. And finally I said, "Look I am the new president of the American Federation of Teachers, I came here to talk to you. I want to have a fine relationship. I wish that you will tell me what your attitude is?"

And he slammed his hand on the desk and he said, "By damn if you want it you will get it." He said, "That little local of yours has given us more

trouble than all of my 600,000 members." He said, "We had gotten agreement with the City Council on 4 members for the School Board. All 4 of them were people that we supported and we were just delighted that we could have their membership. The membership of the City Council to help us on that. What happened when we had our meeting? Your little local came out with a complete new slate of officers." And I said, "Well that is a new local and they don't know any better I will take care of that."

That night I met with the Executive Board of that local and I said to them exactly what the gentleman had said. I said, "You were in error. You are a little bit of a local. You cannot climb to the top of the stairs without walking one step at a time. Now, I want you next time when they come in with a slate even if some of those people are not exactly to your favor, I ask you to support them because that is the kind of relationships you get." They did that and the very next year 1954 when I came out there first came in to see the gentleman and he came to the door threw his arms around me and he said, "Oh Carl, thank you so much for what you have done here. We have had good relationships and we are going to help your local here all we can."

The reason that the local was willing to accept my advice was that Walter Thomas, the president of the local attended the A.F. of T. Convention in Colorado Springs in 1948 and met with the leaders of the Chicago Teachers Union, John Fewkes, Walter Leary, Danny Green, Carl Megel and others. He told us about the problems that existed in California, Los Angeles because of the domination by Local 430 and their communistic philosophies. It was this issue that was the basis of expelling the local in 1949 in Milwaukee. Therefore, Walter Thomas had confidence in my suggestions and immediately

said, "Carl, we are going to do exactly what you tell us because we believe it and believe in you." The local followed suit and did it.

From Los Angeles I went to San Diego, we had 7 members down there. They have a tremendous local there now. I went to Pasadena. I went on up to Salinas over to San Francisco. It happened that Ella Mae Cooper was the president of the local and the lady who is now the president of San Francisco was in her classes at that time. Then I went to Richmond and met Ben Rust, who was the newly elected president of the State Federation of California, State Federation of Teachers. Ben at that time had 800 members in the entire state. I talked to him and we worked out some programs.

Then I went over to Sacramento to the capital because the secretary-treasurer and the president of the Federation of Labor were there working on some legislation. I talked to these gentlemen and I told them that I was the new president of the American Federation of Teachers and that I was here talking to teachers in the interest of organizing teachers and that I would hope that they would help us. And the secretary-treasurer said, "Oh well Megel, you don't have any members and we are supporting the CTA." But I said, "That is the company union." "Oh well, it doesn't matter those are the teachers who represent teachers in California and we are supporting them." "Well," I said, "I can't change your mind on that because it is all wrong." "But," I said, "I will see you later and we will work this out." Again indicating that the labor movement did not understand the problems of education, the problems of teachers, the problem of a teachers union, of course we were small. We had 800 members. The NEA probably had, I am just

guessing 400,000 or something like that. You can imagine why he might want to support them instead of us, however, these were barnacles that we had to get over.

About two years later actually it was in 1954, there was a Bill in Congress that supported labor. I had asked the representative that we had there to get the secretary of the Federation of Labor to attend this meeting. And the representative of the CTA, the California Teachers Association made a presentation and during this presentation somebody said that this is a labor program. Are you supporting labor? And the gentleman said, "Oh no, we are professional we have no reason for supporting labor. We have no interest in labor. Never would we do that." As he came down from the platform, the secretary of the AFL in California stood in the aisle. And the gentleman came down and he said, "Oh my goodness, I didn't mean it don't take that for what I said up there, oh no." He said, "Yes I heard you."

Just about a month later, I was invited by the secretary-treasurer to come to Palo Alto to speak to teachers. He introduced me with the highest praise. There were at least 700 or 800 teachers a tremendous crowd. And I was so pleased by his statement that I was on my high fiddle and I made a powerful speech there that night and got a standing ovation. From that time on we got moving in California. We aren't yet where we ought to be but we are making great progress in California to this day. From Sacramento I went through northern California up to Portland.

Jesse Baxter, the president of the State Federation of Teachers met me and I had a meeting in Portland. She arranged meetings for me. We went down

to Medford. We went down to Roseburg. The president of our local was being fired in Roseburg just for union activity. Of course, they never say that they always give some other reason but it was for his union activity. I went to see the superintendent as I had made a practice to do wherever I went, if I possibly could.

I went to see the superintendent and what I would say to him would be, "Look I know that you are probably not aware of the American Federation of Teachers but I am president and I want you to know what we are concerned about is improving educational opportunities for teachers and for boys and girls in your schools. And where we may have some differences on the approach, yet this is the major ideal that we are working for and I want to and our organization will want to support you in your effort when we can. And, we can work together on many of the issues it doesn't mean that you will give us complete allegiance because I know you have another organization here that is much stronger and much larger but I would like to just tell you that we are here to compliment you on your good work and tell you that we are willing to help you."

What I did was to remove the opposition and the animosities that these superintendents had to AFL as well A.F. of T and I succeeded very well. In practically all these cases at least they didn't say the terrible things they did before. In this regard, I need to tell you something that happened that had a great influence upon the superintendents. They had their meeting in Los Angeles in 1951. The president of the A.F. of T. went to Los Angeles and had a press conference in which he blasted superintendents. And on the first

page of all the papers in Los Angeles as well as throughout the country big headlines, "AFT President blasts Superintendents." Well the superintendents were furious.

In 1952 they had their convention in Cleveland. There was a resolution before the convention that the superintendents would make every effort to prevent the organization of teachers in the A.F. of T. that they would use their complete influence to disrupt the organizations were they existed. That was before the convention. Dr. Harold Hunt, Superintendent of Schools from Chicago immediately got up and he said, "I want to tell you that I oppose this resolution. AFT has a new president. He is a member of my faculty. I know him quite well. The kind of thing that happened last year will not happen as long as Carl Megel is President and I want you to oppose this resolution."

Immediately, Dr. Hanley of Providence got up and said, "I certainly second that motion of Dr. Hunt's. Carl Megel has been in Providence and has operated a relationship between the school board and the teachers that is going to last for ten years. And he did a magnificent job for us, for teachers in Providence and for the Providence school district, and therefore I want to ask that this resolution be dropped." Immediately somebody moved that it be tabled and that was the end of it.

You know teachers were traditionally opposed to superintendents in a manner but they had to recognize at least I recognized that the superintendent was there and that we had to work in a harmonious fashion especially after this resolution was passed. So it was my mission during my

tenure of office to work with superintendents, to support them when they were right, to oppose them when we thought they were wrong but to do it in a professional manner. This program was followed by Al Shanker so that today that relationship has improved considerably and is now in such a fine situation that while I only attended the Convention of the Superintendents at one time, Shanker is constantly invited to attend these conferences and to speak there in behalf of the A.F. of T. So that the progress that has been made has been tremendous and it has had a tremendous affect upon education throughout our country and the relationship between superintendents and teachers.

Which brings me back to a situation in Roseburg, Oregon where I was. The superintendent had fired our president and it was mostly animosity towards unions. I talked to the superintendent in the same fashion that I stated here and I said, "Why don't you put him back and let's see if we can work out problems? I will work with you and I will see that he works with you and we will work together and you work with him and we will get along fine." And he said, "Well," he said, "I don't like to do that but since you have put it in those terms, yes I will put him back." So I got him back into his job and that was a great victory for us in Oregon especially at that time.

From there I went to Seattle, Washington and had a nice meeting there. Seattle was one of our large locals. You know I should have mentioned this before Portland, Oregon is Local number 111. It was organized in 1918 one of our original longtime locals and they have been doing a tremendous job out in

Portland. Seattle has had problems. The president of the local there in 1928 was fired for union activity. He came to the AFT Convention in 1928 and presented the situation in Portland. The AFT at that time did not have any money hired the gentleman to be their organizer and sent him back to Portland, Oregon to organize teachers. He had difficulty but he was able to proceed.

From Portland I went to two or three other locals in Washington with the vice-president from that area Mr. Miller. I got on a train and went to Pocatello, Idaho from there. I met with the local there and then I went by train to Cheyenne, Wyoming we had a small local there. I talked with teachers. They knew I was coming about twenty of them met me at the airport. Because of the labor movement activity in Seattle, the teachers had associated with labor. However, out in Wyoming there was very little organized labor. The teachers were therefore more interested in the AFT and its program of support for teacher salaries and working conditions than they were with affiliation with the AFL. That was because of the situation that they were in. They had very little labor there. From Cheyenne I went on to Denver.

I met with the Denver local and then on to a couple of more locals in Colorado and left for Chicago after thirty-five days on the road. It was the longest period of time that I was on one particular trip. Again this was a first time any of these locals had ever seen the President of the American Federation of Teachers except in Denver where John Eckland had been president and he was a member of the local there. But outside of that it was the first time that these people had seen the President of the A.F. of T. and putting

on a membership campaign in all the locals. They had quotas that I had established and I kept telling them to be sure to work for that quota come to the convention and get your citation award and it began to move. We began to feel like I had to pick them up from the floor where they had been knocked down so many times and put them on their feet and stand them tall and proud that they were members of an organization that had the ideals of the American Federation of Teachers.

One of the ideals of the A.F. of T. was equality. Personally, from my own standpoint living down in southern Indiana on a farm, I was twenty years old before I ever saw a black person. I had never met but one Jewish person and that was a man by the name of Moses Gobel who owned a store in north Vernon. I remember I went up to get a pair of rubbers for my shoes and I stopped at a couple of stores and none of them had my size and I finally came in to Gumbel's store and I said, "I want a pair of rubbers size twelve." I remember he said, "We got them." He had which impressed me it was the first time I had met a Jewish person. The result was that I came to Chicago and even to the A.F. of T. without having any longtime prejudice against people. Our families in Indiana were all very closely knit together and very congenial and operated in good harmony with each other and that is the way I was brought up. I had no prejudice in any way, shape or form.

I do remember that in the very early days, we farmers out there in the South any of the large cities Atlanta, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Augusta, Mobile, Jacksonville all these city locals had a white local and a black

local. Of course, the reason they were organized that way because in the South after the war the schools were set up on a segregated basis. White kids went to white schools and black kids went to black schools.

I was down in Atlanta the superintendent took much pride in taking me to the black schools in Atlanta because she wanted me to see that in Atlanta the black schools were better. The buildings were better. The teachers were better. A better job was being done so that they could use that to prevent any effort at integration of the schools.

We were moving along in the late 40's. There developed throughout the North a feeling that integration should become the issue of all of our people in the United States and that segregation had had its day and had been in existence for too many years. This was a movement that became evident within the A.F. of T. It is interesting of course that much of the effort in this direction at that time came from locals where there were no or else few blacks whatever, however that was still okay.

In 1948 at the convention we passed a resolution that the A.F. of T. would no longer organize segregated locals. Of course this was immediately opposed by our locals in the South but it was a start of the movement towards the resolution we passed in 1956 to outlaw all of our segregated locals in the South. In 1954 when the Supreme Court was considering Brown versus School Board, we talked about this at the Council and I suggested that we enter an amicus curiae brief in support of Brown which the Council then approved. And we did that. As far as I know the NEA never did.

We continued to organize locals in the South but not segregated locals. However it came to a point when we needed to do something and I felt especially pressed when the School Board in 1954 supported Brown against the School Board and said in that statement, "Separate but equal is not equal." However, there also was some politics involved in our issue. Atlanta had 35 votes and during the Communist issues of the 1939 and 1940's, Atlanta had joined the National Caucus. The Progressive Caucus recognizing and some of those people came to me and said, "Look Carl if we get rid of Atlanta the Progressive Caucus will have the majority of votes." And I said, "Well that is no way to handle this issue on that basis." And I did not want to lose all these members if we passed the integration resolution that I knew was going to come about. I had figured that we would lose at least 7,000 members which meant a lot of money we needed so bad in those days.

At the 1955 Council Meeting, I asked the Council to set up a committee to go down and visit the South and see what we can do. Ed Gerald from Cleveland, Bill Swann the black president of Gary and I were named on that committee. We spent two weeks in the South visited all locals. We started at Atlanta talked to their teachers and talked to the labor people. We went to Chattanooga. We went to Mobile. We went to New Orleans. We went to Jacksonville. These were our major locals of the South. We were talking to the leadership of our locals in everyone of these areas. They all said, "We will be very happy to do it if the climate of this community, in other words if the people probably the parents and their kids the white people in that community were willing to integrate that they would be very willing to integrate their local." In fact in New Orleans, the White Teachers Union and

the Black Teachers Union had one office that they worked out of and they had a joint bank account. It made considerable progress toward integration. Results of our two weeks gave little indication that we had made any progress.

We came to the Convention in Pittsburgh in 1956, by this time integration had moved quite specifically forward. In order to try to get the thing in line so we didn't lose all these locals and these members, I had invited the president and the officers of the Atlanta local to come to Pittsburgh before the convention and on Saturday to meet with our Executive Council. Roger Dertheck, who was the president of that local, whose brother Lawrence I think was then Commissioner of Education here in Washington. He had previously been Superintendent of the Schools in Chattanooga, a rather liberal guy and that is why I thought may be Roger would to and we talked for about two hours. We weren't getting anywhere and finally I said to Roger, I said, "Roger will you promise me and this Council that you will go back to Atlanta and remove the word white from your Constitution. The Contitution said, "Membership in this Atlanta Teachers Association shall be open to all white teachers in Atlanta." And he looked right at me and he said, "Under no condition would I even think about it." And I said, "Well Roger, I see no reason why we need to discuss this any further because we are not getting anywhere. I thank you for coming," and they left.

Then I said to the Council, "It is now evident that we are not going to get this by this method. I, therefore, ask a committee and I appointed, I think Herrick Roth was chairman of Denver to write a resolution that we will present to the Convention. That resolution was written and presented to the

Convention. We spent the entire afternoon, I think it was Tuesday afternoon of the Convention discussing the resolution. It was one of the most moving sessions that we had during my tenure of office. There wasn't a harsh word said by anybody. The people from the South especially Millsept from Chattanooga actually shed tears as he said, "I don't want to lose membership in the American Federation of Teachers, I am a labor person and I want to stay in the labor movement." And others too, they made a very discreet and humble presentation. Of course in order to pass the resolution we had to have a two-thirds vote.

The resolution was finally presented said that all segregated locals within the A.F. of T. are required to give up their charters and a new charter be issued which will include membership of all the teachers black and white within their local jurisdiction and that this be effective by December 31, 1957. And that was passed. Now immediately the New Orleans white local withdrew. The Chattanooga white local withdrew. At that same convention there was a resolution passed to increase the dues .10c a month. That was in support of my recommendation that we raise the dues from .60c a month to .75c. The convention had immediately approved .5c. Then somebody moved .2c more and we had a roll call on that and we passed that so now we had .7c a month which was a big help but we still needed more money. Then somebody moved that we raise the dues .10c more and that we do it by referendum.

Now the referendum cost me \$15,000 of money I could not afford. Atlanta paid per capita through December, 1957 and on December 10, five days before the end of the referendum sent in their charter, their check through December

and voted 2,000 no votes on the .10c dues increase. And we lost the dues increase by 500 votes. The action of the Council and the Convention put another big load upon my shoulders because not only did we lose the .10c I had hoped to get in dues, but within the next year we lost 7,000 members because all the white locals withdrew. The interesting thing was that the black locals without the support of the white locals had difficulty in maintaining themselves.

New Orleans had 450 members in the white local and 650 in the black local. The black local was in existence by itself after the white local withdrew and slowly the membership declined from 650 until it then came down to 18 members. Veronica Hill, who was the president of the black local, a lovely lady, a very helpful Council member was also a Vice-President. I called her and I said, "Veronica, I want you to set up a meeting and I am coming down there." She did and we could not even meet at that time in the hotel in New Orleans where I was staying. We had to go miles out of the center of town to a restaurant owned by a black man. A restaurant known as Dukey's and there were about 18 people there. I gave them a good talking to and I said, "Veronica, you know how hard we worked to get this integration thing and now you are down to 18. You can't operate like that and we can't make this a success. You have got to get busy and start doing this thing and you have to start bringing some white people into your local."

Eventually Gene Didier, who is now Director of Organization from the Atlanta district for the A.F. of T. a white teacher in New Orleans became the president. It was the first white person to join the local. They began to grow and the next year Nat LaCour became president of that local and Nat is

still there and has done a fantastic job. He was one of the people who was promoting collective bargaining. I was down there in the evening when he met with the School Board of five members was divided two to two with one on the fence.

We had a rally 4,000 teachers showed up. We marched up one street and down the other and came to the auditorium and filled it so that people were standing around the aisle. Nat LaCour, the black President of the local a tall, handsome gentleman made a spectacular presentation. So that the Board member who was on the fence at the next vote, voted with the two supporting the collective bargaining position and then negotiated a contract after that which was one of the finest New Orleans had. They have made great progress down there ever since.

The fact that Nat LaCour and his integrated local now was able to get advantages which the black local itself could not get was because the power still in the South was in the hands of the whites. And, therefore the white locals on the integrated basis would make progress and the blacks would get the same benefits that the white locals got in most cases. That is why when the white locals were through the blacks standing by themselves lost their prop.

Just the fact that the Supreme Court decision was made did not provide immediate support by the school district of the South. I remember with great repugnance Governor Wallace standing before the door of a university to

prevent a black lady from enrolling and also in Louisiana the effort made by the Everest's and those people. The struggle was not ended. It took a long time for the schools to be completely integrated in the South. Now down in Atlanta nothing happened for a number of years until along about 1960 a white lady by the name of Romaine became the president of the local and she did a fantastic job in reorganizing that local. There are nearly 3,000 teachers in that local in a good integrated local and the majority of them there are black teachers. They were always good teachers because Atlanta was one of the areas where they prided themselves on having good black segregated schools, therefore when they integrated those people were still there.

However, in the North integration took a little more time but it eventually came about slowly. There was never any opposition but many black teachers migrated to the North and applied for positions in the schools and, of course, also the fact that many black people moved North. In fact, in Mississippi any black family that wanted to move received \$5.00 per head from the state in order to move out of the state and go North. Many of them did. That is why Chicago when I was there in the 30's had maybe 300,000 blacks and now they have got 3 or 4 million.

Now there was a big issue that we need to be concerned with at this time. I mentioned previously that in 1931 when I took the Chicago exam it was extremely difficult. I had to get permission to take the exam. I had to pass an exam in physics and general science in educational courses and in professional studies. Then I had to take a laboratory test. Then I had to take a physical. Then I had to go down for two hours and take an oral where there were nine principals that shot questions at me for two hours and all of

these were graded every step and when I got through as I said my average was 92. I was very proud of that it was a very difficult test. However, after the war when Europe was devastated and needed all kinds of equipment, all kinds of goods, our factories in this country began going night and day. They needed employees and many of our boys were not back from the war yet. Many of them were left over there and so they had to raise salaries. They had to raise salaries to get people in jobs. Many teachers found that they could make more money in industry and they left the teaching profession.

Now here is what the school board did and they should never have done it. Instead of raising salaries to meet competition they did away with these entrance requirements and they did not give the tests anymore. The result was that many teachers were employed during that period who could not have met the competency test that I had to take in 1931. When they talked about the fact that our school systems were not up to what they were in the past, it was the responsibility of the school boards not the teachers who would have stayed there and many others who would have come in who would have been qualified and who would have kept the standards up.

Of course there was another issue of importance at this very time and a number of teachers did lose their job because they were accused of being communists. Whether they were or not was always a question. Now the American Federation of Teachers was involved in this whole episode. In 1953 at the A.F. of T. Convention, my first convention in my president's address, I asked the convention to pass the resolution asking President Eisenhower to direct Senator McCarthy from trying to run the United States Government by finding a communist behind every fence post.

Our organization was committed to the civil liberties of our members and McCarthy's action was contrary to that position. The people who were being chased by McCarthy many of them lost their jobs, many of them were scared and I wanted to be sure that our organization was on record opposed to this kind of action. Also in 1954 Bella Dodd, who was the communist leader and legislative director for the state of New York was brought before the Walters Committee which was a committee investigating the un-American activities. At this hearing in Philadelphia, I was there she said when asked when any teachers were communist she said, "Yes there were people in Newark, New Jersey who were part of the communist movement." She said, "These three" and she named them Bob Lowenstein, Ralph Zimmerman and a lady by the name of Laba at this hearing before the Board of Education. The Board said, "By taking the Fifth Amendment at the hearing before the Walters Committee were you guilty of action unbecoming a teacher?" And they all three said, "No." They immediately were dismissed.

At the Council meeting in December, 1954 representatives of the Newark Teachers Union came to the Council meeting and asked for \$500.00 for each of these three people from the Defense Fund of the American Federation of Teachers to support them. The Council was just up in a roar. "Oh no, we are not going to support communists. We are not going to support them," and it took quite a lot of discussion. Finally I said you can prove it by the record in the Council meeting, I said, "Well I think you ought to take this very carefully. In my opinion, the Fifth Amendment is a sacred document that protects people from being prosecuted or subjected to unjust causes or

reasons and I think that the school board by asking if they were guilty of action unbecoming a teacher by taking the Fifth Amendment and they said no was not an action that we should consider for support of their dismissal." Then Ed Gerrald, who was a lawyer from Cleveland was on the Board he said, "That is a new thought I had not thought about that I agree with Carl I think that is a point we ought to consider." Therefore we voted \$500.00 and we are not going to say anymore about it.

In 1955 we went to the Convention in Fort Wayne. We were going along fairly well until Wednesday evening, I left the hotel for the first time in five days to go out for dinner and while I was sitting there an education reporter who is Gene Curvan, a good friend of mine came by and he said, "Carl what's up?" And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The paper in Newark has come out this evening with a big headline 'AFT Teachers Support Communist Teachers'." Well we had not done that of course so I said, "What should I do?" He said, "I think that you are in trouble and I think the best thing for you to do is to put this on the floor and let the AFT Convention handle it so that you don't get the full brunt of the responsibility."

I went back to the hotel got my secretary out of bed it was now two o'clock in the morning and at three o'clock we had a Council meeting. I told them all the details and I think that the best thing for us to do is to put this on the floor of the Convention and let the delegates decide what to do about it. The Council supported my suggestion that we put this on the floor of the convention for the reason that we did not want the story to go forth that the AFT was supporting communist teachers. We did not support the

ideals that these teachers were communist because they had not done anything that we could be sure of except to take the Fifth Amendment. It was that idea that we were supporting. The result was that there was considerable debate. There was great hostility about the fact that the Council had provided \$500.00 to each of these people from our Defense Fund. Our Defense Fund comes out of the dues. The Constitution says, "A certain amount of money has to be set aside for the Defense Fund." Therefore, it is teachers money that makes up the Defense Fund.

The Convention eventually voted that our attorney John Ligtenberg should confer with the three attorneys, one for each of the three teachers. After our attorney John Ligtenberg consults with the three attorneys for the three teachers and it was assured that these people were not now or had not been communists, then the money could be paid. That was the resolution that was passed practically unanimously by the Convention after about two and a half or three hours of debate and everybody was happy with it. John immediately went to Newark and came back and reported to me in writing that after consulting with the attorneys, he was assured that these people were not now or had not been communists. Therefore, we now paid the money.

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CARL MEGEL INTERVIEW

August 27, 1986

Tape 4

The communist movement was a very touchy issue for the American Federation of Teachers members, for the reason that in the organization communist infiltration had been of tremendous disruption. During the Depression of the 1920's, there was deliberate movement to organize the Communist Party in the United States because they said this is of particular interest to those of the liberal persuasion particularly in higher education. Look it is very evident that the kind of government we have here will not work. Look at the millions of people that are out of work. What you should do is try something else maybe the kind of program we have in Russia would be an improvement here because in Russia they do not have unemployment, of course, you know that workers have a workers paradise.

The result was that in 1925 Mary Barker in her convention address stated that there are elements in our organization who are always promoting the liberal philosophy of which the A.F. of T. has been promoting. It moved slowly until the 1930's and during the 30's membership increased. In 1935 they came to the convention by very interesting technique found a candidate. During the 1935 year 1934 year especially, Ohio began doing organizing that

they had not done before. Cleveland Local 250, Springfield Local 251, Cleveland Local 279 were all organized. Springfield organized with 100 per cent membership and this was tremendous progress.

The leaders of the communists movement knowing that the Ohio new locals knew absolutely nothing about what was going on in New York and Philadelphia were very interested when they said, "Why don't we nominate somebody from Ohio because you have done such a great job of organizing." They nominated the president of the Toledo local, Mr. Lowrey. Immediately after the election, they found that the Council now also had a majority who had the communist ideology. Therefore, from 1935 on the AFT was controlled by those delegates particularly from New York City College in New York and Philadelphia and a sprinkling of others around the country who believed that the communist philosophy would be good for the A.F. of T.

The AFL were very unhappy with this movement and at the convention in 1938 William Green, president of the AFL came to the Convention and stated that if the AFT wants to get and maintain its position within the labor movement they had to clean their house. There was a boo from the section where the communists drew supporters sat. President Green pointed right through them. He said, "You can boo if you want to but it shows that some of you are here." Now also in 1938 John Fewkes, president of the Chicago Teachers Union which is now beginning to grow, we grew from 2,000 to 9,000 in four months. In 1937 he had a meeting with a number of us from our own local Art Walls, Walter Werry and myself, Arthur Elder from Detroit and different people

around. George Counts was there, this is the first time I met George Counts. George Counts said, "Look at the AFT, I have been a member since it was organized, and I do not necessarily need to be president of the A.F. of T. but if you people will support me I will be president long enough to expel the communist movement from our ranks."

We went to the convention in 1939 in Buffalo. We called it the first battle of Buffalo. It was an unforgettable convention. This group had about 200 votes in the convention. Our group which as we moved along called it the Progressive Caucus and this is not to be associated with the Progressive Caucus which I talked about in 1948. By that time the caucuses had kind of simmered out but this was called the Progressive Caucus in order to get us together. Progressive Caucus had about 260 votes. The convention had about 600 votes all together. Therefore, in order to get 300 votes the communist group had to pick up 100 votes and they did it year after year by very clever tricks. I will give you one idea.

I was sitting in the back of the room and the president who got elected in 1938, if so and so is from Palo Alto is in the audience will she please come up and get her credentials and sure enough she was in the last seat in the back row and she walked down the row all the way to the front while this click and they all sat together, cheered and cheered and cheered and they had people up in the balcony who cheered and of course these people that came from the small locals around who knew nothing about all this, "Look who is that person, my land why did they cheer?" The next day right in the morning the president said if Miss so and so from Palo Alto was in the audience will she come up and get her committee assignments. The committee assignments were

in the jackets. This was a trick. She came up again the same way. They cheered and cheered and cheered. On Wednesday morning a gentleman gets up he said, "I am so humble today, I have a great privilege. I am here to nominate the outstanding teacher, outstanding union leader from Palo Alto, California went on and on and as sure as the world she got elected because they carried enough of those people over and many other things like that. I think seven or eight things that I have enumerated kinds of tricks that they pulled. Now these were not illegal but it showed how they could manipulate an audience from a minority point of view.

At the convention in 1936 Mr. Lowrey from Toledo was running the convention and these communist groups New York groups and Philadelphia groups were sitting in the clack over here on the right. They began giving him so much trouble that he grabbed his gavel with a few cuss words threw it right in the middle of their group and said, "You can go to hell." And he walked off the platform and never came back. They then let the delegate from Atlanta finish up the convention. She did a very fine job. Her name was Allie Mann.

At the 1937 convention Jerome Davis, who was a Divinity School teacher at Yale and who was a member of the Yale local which was largely the Divinity School professors became the President of the A.F. of T. I met Jerome Davis many, many times. In his last few years he came to Maryland and lived in a home just outside of Rockville and used to come down to see me every now and then. I never knew to this day whether he was a member of the communist party, however whether he was or whether he wasn't made no difference. The

communist group could not have had a better person to support their cause than Jerome Davis. He had tours to Russia. He wanted me to go with him several times. Every summer he had tours to Russia. I talked to him about many things. He wrote a booklet on peace which was written from the philosophy of the Divinity School sold a million copies and he had enough money so he could live. After he lost his presidency in 1939, he also lost his job out at Yale and never got it back and he was in a very, very poor state financially.

We came to the convention in 1940 and in the meantime we had gained members of our own. We also had been getting all of the, when I say we, I mean largely the Chicago Teachers Union which was the leadership and John Fewkes, who was the President of the Chicago Teachers Union did an outstanding job at this convention. He was the floor leader. He was supported by Stanton Smith, who was president of the Chattanooga local and they did a great job. What they had to do was every time the communist group made a presentation John would get up and say, "I see this is another communist trick." And he would tell them why it was because the communist group had gotten there early and they had the delegates list and they had assigned one person to each of these new delegates. The main thing they were to tell them, when you get to the convention you be very sure to watch how the big Chicago local wants to take over this convention and force their position onto you. Now you are a little local and what they want in Chicago, the big Chicago local is not what you want. Now, we are going to try and support the position that you want and therefore by this indoctrination they had convinced these people that the Chicago teachers were an evil empire. So

John had to tell them every time and make them understand that what the communist leadership was doing and how it would affect all of us.

However, we did not get too far until about Friday evening. Friday afternoon after lunch there was a resolution that we had put on the floor changing the Constitution to read, "Membership in the American Federation of Teachers shall be open to anyone regardless of race, creed or national origin." And then put in this, "Excepting that anyone subject to totalitarian control such as Nazis, Fascists or Communists shall not be a member of the A.F. of T. Now the communists fought that night and day up and down finally, Friday afternoon one of the delegates from New York got up and said, "We are teachers. We have been fighting here a whole week on a resolution and we should not be fighting each other we should be working together. We have no objection to this resolution excepting that it has a terrible error. It says that Nazis, Fascists or Communists cannot become members. Well the word Communists should not be in there because Communism is a democracy." Well the minute he said that the blinkers went off the eyes of all the rest of those people. We called for a vote and we won it big and then our balloter gave up and said that we all should go back home now.

The Council voted following the convention to pick up the charters of New York Local 5, City College Local 547 I believe it was and Philadelphia Local 193. These were the three prominent locals that participated in these debates. They gave the counsel of these people a chance to come to Chicago and discuss this with a committee of the Council. I have the report. There is nothing in it that is of importance. At least the Council gave them a

chance to speak. The Council therefore voted to rescind the charters but to have a referendum of all of the locals, all the members and that was done. Here again we had to put on a tremendous campaign in order to win that election. We were surprised how many even in Chicago 900 were in favor of not picking up the charters of these locals. But we finally won it, we expelled those locals.

In 1941 the Guild which had been a member of Local 5 but in 1935 because of this communist activity within the local withdrew voluntarily and formed the Guild. Rebecca Simonson and Smallheizer were president of that local. In 1941 they applied for a charter and that charter was granted and it was given to them as charter number two. The reason that they got charter number two was that when the Chicago Teachers Union was formed in 1937 the Chicago locals had number one, the Men Teachers number two, the High School Women number three, the Elementary and number five was New York. Therefore when the Chicago Union was formed local one, two and three turned in their charters and the Chicago Teachers Union took number one. Number two was vacant therefore the Guild took that charter and was called the New York Guild, Local number two of the American Federation of Teachers.

Later when we chartered a new local in Philadelphia they took number three. Number four has been Gary ever since the very beginning and number five has not been taken and probably never will because it was the communist local that was expelled and nobody wants that charter.

The labor movement has a long history particularly the Carpenters Union from Europe that brought the first organization into the United States. That

was followed by other labor unions but these were craft unions they were miners, carpenters, bricklayers and crafts of that time and they were solidly united. However when the railroads came along, it was almost impossible to organize on that basis. And finally, Eugene Debs organized the American Railroad Union and it was organized on an industrial basis type of union. The craft unions were solidly craft. But when you got to railroads and later auto workers it was impossible to organize the auto workers on the craft basis. You could not organize the glaziers who worked with glass, the painters and all that when all of them were working in the one plant. So the industrial unionism began moving along and in 1898 when George Poland who headed the plant making railroad cars down south of Chicago at Putnam, Illinois, when he cut wages, raised the rent the people had in the little houses, then increased the dividends that he paid to his people who invested in his organization.

The people there under Debs went on strike. President Cleveland sent the Federal troops down there even though the Illinois Governor said, "No it is not their business I will not send them." Those Federal troops came down there and shot some people. They arrested Debs and put him in jail and they almost broke up the industrial union movement. That industrial union movement then was simmering for years and years until 1924 when John L. Lewis came along and organized the Miners. He saw the advantage of industrial unionism because by this time the steelworkers and the auto workers and workers of that kind could not be organized on a craft basis.

Now in 1924 I remember that the AFL had its convention and Sam Gompers the first President of the AFL who organized the AFL in 1892 died suddenly. They had the convention down in Texas and they went on a trip to Mexico City and they came back and Mr. Gompers died. They had an election and the election was between John L. Lewis and Bill Green. Bill Green, who was in the Carpenters Union received all their votes and got elected. John L. Lewis then began organizing the Miners on an industrial basis and in 1935 at the convention Mr. Lewis came in and asked that eight unions which were organized on an industrial basis be allowed into the AFL and the AFL voted it down. So John L. Lewis, and I remember him doing this so very well, began to organize the Steelworkers, the Auto workers, the Miners and all these people on an industrial basis. That means that everybody regardless of what they did in the plant could belong to the same union.

Just reading about what was going on in the area because we started getting the newspapers in the country out on the farm in 1906, so I understood about the Wobblies and all the other people in the union movement. I had little relation with it because I was a farmer first, and then I was a teacher in a small school. We were under the Education Association and we were required to join but I did not know much about unions until sometime later. However, John L. Lewis and I followed this very closely because I was much interested. In 1935 he began to organize the CIO, he moved that movement into three million members in just a short time. It was about that time when the Chicago teachers because of the abuse they had taken from the Board of Education, began to think about unions as an organization within the entire teaching body you see in Chicago. So we were organized and unified as the Chicago Teachers Union affiliated with the AFL.

Now the CIO under John L. Lewis was moving rapidly and great feuds developed between the AFL and the CIO because of their interest in membership. That was basically the reason for the feud otherwise they were all workers and they should be in unions which the AFL had not organized and John L. Lewis did and therefore it was a membership feud as much as anything else. Of course there was an ideological difference too, the craft unions had great pride in their own craft. The carpenters were just great carpenters. The brick masons were great artisans and they took great pride in that and they felt that in an industrial union this pride in their workmanship was lost. You see this pride in workmanship was also one of the reasons why teachers joined and maintained their membership in the AFL. Even though they did have at the convention in 1937 in Madison, Wisconsin efforts of some of the people to move the A.F. of T. into the CIO failed so miserably.

The feuding between the AFL and CIO was quite hectic and continued for a number of years. It happened, however, that the leadership of the AFL was under William Green from 1924 and the leadership of the CIO was under Mr. Murray. As long as these two gentlemen were presidents of the International union they never could have merged. It happened that in 1952 Bill Murray and Bill Green died within two weeks of each other. This elevated George Meany to the AFL and Walter Reuther to the CIO. These were two dynamic young men who saw the futility of the feuding and who saw the possibility of potential by merging, therefore, they began immediately by talking about merger.

At the AFL Convention in New York in 1955 it was my privilege to lead the AFT delegation to that convention. The merger resolution was unanimously approved and when it was approved Walter Reuther and George Meany stood at the podium. Meany held the gavel and Reuther held his hand and they raised it above and over the crowd, everyone stood it was a very emotional moment. There was not a dry tear in that auditorium of about 4,000 labor people.

Meany was the AFL president in a very difficult period. He did an excellent job in leading the union because there still was animosities out in the field between the industrial workers and the craft workers. Meany did so much to ease the path of unionism in that respect. So far as I was concerned and the A.F. of T. was concerned my relations with Mr. Meany were always friendly. I always called him Mr. Meany and we always got along very nicely. However, when we needed some assistance from the unions it was within the department of the Industrial Union headed by Walter Reuther where we got our greatest assistance.

The Industrial Union department was established in a manner to keep the industrial union workers together because most of the people that belonged to the Industrial Union department were from the industrial workers. Some of the crafts did not join the Industrial Union department but Walter Reuther was the president of this and he had a lot of money in that organization. I had been acquainted with Walter Reuther because I was a member of the Board of the United Nations Association of which Mr. Reuther was very very active in organizing and promoting. And so I became very well acquainted with Walter Reuther. Moreover, Walter Reuther had the idea of growth within the labor movement throughout the United States.

When the New York teachers began to become a little bit active, it was Walter Reuther who began to see the possibilities within New York. I had made a presentation to the Executive Council of the AFL without a great deal of support but Walter Reuther was the one who supported me at that time. In January, 1961 after the Guild had their strike for one day in 1960, I talked to Walter Reuther and he said, "This is the way to go." And he said, "I tell you Carl, I am going to send you \$25,000 tomorrow morning." Well, I almost fell off my chair because I had never seen \$25,000 in all the time that I was president, however, that check was there.

On January 18, 1961 we had a meeting in New York which I arranged. At that meeting Walter Reuther, Nick Zonarich his Director of Organization, Charlie Cogen, President of New York Guild, Dave Selden his assistant, Al Shanker whom I had put into New York the year before, and I were there at that meeting. Walter said, "Now it looks to me like you have a great opportunity here in New York because the fact is we had somewhere around 2,000 members may be more or less but somewhere around that number is all we ever had." He said, "We got a great opportunity here in New York." He said, "I am going to give you \$25,000 a month for the next six months then I will give you another \$25,000 for the next six months which is on a loan basis." That was \$300,000 with that money the organization in New York was possible.

The leadership of the New York leaders and Al Shanker, they grew and grew. They were able to get the High School Teachers Association which had

about 4,000 members to merge with the Guild and Al called me and he said, "They don't want the Guild name." I said, "Give them any name they want." He said, "How about United Federation." I said, "That is great." So, we called it the United Federation of Teachers and sometime later I presented it a charter to Charlie Cogen and to officers of the union as the United Federation of Teachers in New York. That organization from that day on began to grow until today they have over 60,000 members in New York. With that leadership in New York and with that membership, New York State which never had more than 800 members all the time up to this period also began to merge, so today New York State has somewhere between 125,000 and 150,000 members a sure thing.

While we were moving well in New York, Walter Reuther had indicated to me that other funds would be available. It was possible for me to put an organizer into Cleveland, into Chicago, into Philadelphia, into Milwaukee with the funds from the IUD. We also here in Washington we had a small local that had gotten down to nine members. I came in and talked to people and finally got a hold of Bill Simons and asked Walter to give us some money which he did. We put Bill Simons on full-time and we increased the membership to 4,500 with collective bargaining in the city of Washington.

I want you to remember that up to this time, we didn't have enough money to hire organizers. We had one here and there but nothing of any great consequence. The organizing that was done was done by me. I did the organizing and we grew every year but not in great numbers because I could not organize all over the country. We hired people. The money we got from the IUD went for salaries and organizational programs and we made great

progress. That is the beginning of why we became a tremendous organization that we are today. Without that help, we could never never never have done what we did. We had to have the funds in order to do it which we never had. We were an impoverished organization. I said that year after year at the convention that we were an impoverished organization. If we had money we might be able to do a good job of organizing.

The AFT moved along in a splendid fashion and was in conjunction with the labor movement during these years. We were distressed when we saw Walter Reuther remove his Auto Workers from the AFL-CIO. At that time he invited other Internationals to join with him, however, Mr. Meany was very adamant that anyone who joined the labor alliance which Mr. Reuther had set up could not continue to be a member of the AFL.

At a meeting of the United Nations sometime later, I talked to Walter Reuther. It was the last time I saw him before he died in the auto crash up in northern Michigan. He told me he said, "Carl, I am very disappointed that the AFT for whom I did so much did not follow the withdrawal from the AFL which I instituted." It must be remembered that I was no longer AFT president at that time. However, I said, "Walter I can tell you exactly why. Throughout our country, throughout our nation the AFL has Central Labor Bodies in every city we have a Central Labor Body. I know that when I was in Chicago, the Chicago Teachers Union got all kinds of help from the Chicago Federation of Labor." And, I said, "The United Auto Workers is in Detroit and has very small membership in other areas. The AFT could not exist except

for the help and assistance that we get from the Central Labor Bodies. The boards of education, the school administration, the Education Association, the civic and other organizations within the city would not allow us to live unless we had the support of the Central Labor Bodies. We also got much help from the State Federations of Labor."

Well Walter said, "Carl, I don't agree with that, I guess that has something in it." I said, "You know there is nobody who has greater respect and admiration for you than Carl Megel." But I said, "The reason that the AFT didn't withdraw was because the umbrella of the labor movement as indicated by Central and State Labor Bodies was the umbrella that kept us alive." With the political situation developing during the days that I was president during the Roosevelt period before I was A.F. of T. president, it occurred to me that if the A.F. of T. was going to be of any influence you would have to take a position of note in the politics of our nation, of our state and of our local community.

We did this in Chicago. We went to Springfield and talked to the legislators. I remeber I talked to a legislator about a position on some school issue and I said to him, I said, "You know you have a lot of teachers in your district." He said, "Hell Megel they don't vote they aren't even registered." I came back to Chicago and checked his district and I found that he was absolutely right, twenty percent of the teachers had registered. We therefore set up campaigns. We got teacher workers. See even up until 1951 when I was elected full-time, paid, vice-president, the Chicago Teachers Union only had one person that was the president who was paid. All the rest were teachers who taught school all day and worked voluntarily for the union

afternoons and evenings. I worked fourteen years as chairman of the Salary Committee made presentations to the Board of Education and things like that until I became full-time vice-president. I was on the Pension Board and worked full-time.

We then got people together took each legislative district and we matched the teachers with the district and we saw that they got registered and we saw that they would vote. It made a big difference when we went to Springfield after that and we talked about teachers in your district. They said, "Oh yes we know that now, what is this issue you want to talk to me about? And it made all the difference in the world.

Now in order that we could have an influence nationally, it was necessary that we did something in that respect on a national level. During my presidency we were not able to do much of that, however in 1964, I was elected full-time Legislative Director for the American Federation of Teachers and came to Washington from Chicago to be the full-time legislative representative. I was the first legislative representative that the AFT ever had on a full-time basis. We had people who worked here part-time but I was the first one. It happened that I came at a very parturient time because when I came here John Kennedy was President.

I had many meetings in the White House with John Kennedy and then with Lyndon Johnson. And Lyndon Johnson of all the Presidents was the one who was most interested. We have never had a President who was as interested in education as Lyndon Johnson. He had been a teacher in a poor community down

in southern Texas. He saw these poor people come in who needed an education so very much and he was the one who proposed that we have Federal Aid to Education. The A.F. of T. had passed a resolution at the A.F. of T. convention in 1919 asking that the Federal Government provide assistance to the local and state school districts for education. We never could get that bill passed even though we worked on it for all those years. It took forty-six years.

Finally, when Lyndon Johnson was here with our efforts and the labor efforts and all the good people who were interested in it around this country, we were able to pass the Elementary-Secondary Education Act. Which not only gave breakfast to starving kids around the country but elementary education assistance, high school education assistance, for higher education, for libraries, for vocational education, for impact aid and for all of these other issues. It was tremendous legislation we were able to pass at that time. When the Bill was passed a number of us met in the White House to congratulate Lyndon Johnson but he took the Bill down to a little schoolhouse in Texas where he went to school. I stood in that schoolhouse sometime later. As he signed that Bill he said, "I am signing this Bill because it is my firm belief that education is the certain escape from poverty." I thought that was a profound statement and one that we should never forget in our nation. President Kennedy, of course, brought a new vision to all of America when he became President of the United States. I have a profound memory of President Kennedy.

In 1963 Secretary Wirtz designated me as the president of the American Federation of Teachers to represent the United States at a conference on

education to be held in Geneva, Switzerland. At this conference, there were representatives from thirty-four nations from around the world. It was a representative group. We met for the entire week. We prepared a treatise on the status of teachers worldwide. In that treatise, I proposed that we put in this statement, "That teachers have the right to join organizations of their choice without coercion or intimidation that they have a right to negotiate contracts with their employers or board of education and that they have the right to enter into written agreements on the negotiations." I got little support the first day but each day I proposed it again and again and finally on the very last day one of the gentlemen said, "I move that we support Mr. Megel's position." It was put into the treatise which was then approved by the International Labor Organization and also approved by UNESCO. It was therefore a world document that collective bargaining for public employees and teachers become legalized.

I became acquainted with many of these delegates who were there and I said to the director that I would like to have a picture. And he said, "I am glad that you mentioned it." So we had a picture taken of these people out on the steps of the ILO building. I had a copy of that and the names and addresses of each of those delegates. When I got back to Chicago I wrote each of them a letter thanking them for their efforts in behalf of education and bringing greetings from the American Federation of Teachers. That was in August, 1963.

I did not hear from a single one of those people. However, within two weeks of November 23, 1963 when Kennedy was assassinated I got a letter from

every single one of those thirty-three people. And they said about the same thing in three different sentences. Number one. Mr. Megel, we are sorry about Mr. Kennedy. Number two. Mr. Megel, what does this do for democracy in America? The reason that was there because they could not understand the transition that we have in our Constitution. Because Kennedy was hardly dead when Lyndon Johnson was already President. However the most significant statement was made was the third one. Mr. Megel, what does this do for peace in the world? I think that was the most significant statement because somewhere along the line President Kennedy had instilled in the people of the world the idea that the United States was leading a parade for peace. That is not happening today. Instead of being loved as we were then around the world, today we are not loved in any fashion by many many people around the world and this is one of our major problems.

Now, of course, as we relate to what President Kennedy was doing I must tell you that part of the difficulties we had within the A.F. of T. was the conflict between groups within the A.F. of T. The caucus developed from 1926 on and developed into Progressive and the National Caucus. These caucuses were so determined that their policies were promoted and their people were elected to office that the program of the A.F. of T. was submerged to the caucus program. I remember very well writing to one caucus member after the convention stating that I was disappointed that they took such a violent position on an issue which was detrimental in my opinion to the A.F. of T. The answer came back the position was that of the caucus and I shall always be loyal to my caucus. Now that gave you an idea that the A.F. of T. did not matter.

It was a problem that I had very very much difficulty with trying to overcome that animosity between the caucuses. This was a stumbling block one of the barnacles which I had to overcome in order to build a very fine union. I did not completely succeed until 1966 when the Progressive Caucus which was largely New York, Detroit, areas of Minnesota and the National Caucus which was largely Chicago, Gary, Cleveland and that part of the country. When the Progressive Caucus not only won the presidency with Charles Cogen but every vice-president. Immediately, John Desmond from Chicago came to me and said, "Carl what do we do now?" And I said, "Do you want to be on that council the next two years?" "I sure do." I said, "All right then join the Progressive Caucus." He said, "You mean I should give up the National Caucus and join the Progressive Caucus?" I said, "That is exactly what I said."

Charlie Smith from Gary came to me so also did Jim Heller from Minneapolis so also did Jim O'Meara, President of Cleveland. I told all of them that if they wanted to be a member of the Council the next two years they should get into the Progressive Caucus. They all did. Unfortunately, Jim Heller got tangled up in a political area and wasn't able to accomplish this. But, they all joined the Progressive Caucus and then two years later they were all elected as AFT vice-presidents and for the first time the A.F. of T. and since that time to this very day until this election this year, they were almost free of any opposition of the various caucuses. A great cause for the progress and growth of the A.F. of T. under Al Shanker because he has a unified group working together to improve and advance the A.F. of T.

Now the caucus system devolved us out of our political position. There wasn't a great deal of differences accepting that the people who were in one caucus strove to elect their officers from their caucus. It was somewhat a difference between the east and the west and there is of course, a big difference between the east and the west in their thinking. The east thought that they were more liberal than they were in the west but that was not true at all. It was only in a major degree that they considered this. The fact that we had two caucuses when I was president that was so close in their voting strength that ten votes would change the bottom five of the fifteen members on the Executive Council gives you some idea of the fighting and feuding that was going on between the two caucuses. It was a great detriment to me and my program for growth in the A.F. of T.

When I became president we only had 39,000 members. We had \$200,000 to run the organization with as compared to millions of dollars we have now and hundreds of thousands of members. We never could of had those if we continued the caucus system we had. Now somebody could say, well look you are putting in autocracy. Well in a way it is autocracy but on the other hand everything on the floor of the convention is open for debate. Anybody can debate whatever they wish. The election of officers is open and people can vote for them as they wish. It is very true that the larger locals determine who is elected and since the larger locals are in the one caucus now, there is a unity of purpose.

The purpose is and the one that I have always envisioned. To build an organization that would make teaching a position which would put bread on the

table, a roof over your head and clothes on your back and to elevate a teacher to a position of professionalism which Al Shanker is now promoting. It couldn't have been done under any other situation and therefore I am very pleased that we have eliminated this barnacle that was the caucus system that prevented me from doing more than I did for 12 years when I was AFT president.

For purpose of clarification say, where is your democracy? Well the fact is when I was president we had 15 vice-presidents today we have 34. Those vice-presidents are elected at large and they represent every section of the nation. Therefore, all our teachers and all areas of the nation are represented on that executive board. In addition, what they are doing is they are working for the American Federation of Teachers. They are not working for the Progressive Caucus or for the National Caucus as we had before and feuding and fighting on issues that slow down the forward movement and the progress of the A.F. of T.

With the solidarity within the A.F. of T. and the assistance and finances we got from the Industrial Union Department under the leadership of Walter Reuther, the growth became known nationwide and the influence began to be felt.

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CARL MEGEL INTERVIEW

October 10, 1986

Tape 5

With advance movement in politics it became necessary to collect funds to help candidates. For this purpose AFT organized the Committee on Political Education. COPE committees have been organized throughout the United States and have been most helpful in collecting funds for candidates and for organizing campaigns in behalf of those candidates. It must be remembered that the opposition to the labor movement required that no dues of any member could be used for political purposes. Funds had to be collected entirely on a voluntary basis for members. I am not so sure that is true in industrial organizations but it is certainly true and it is very carefully watched by the Right to Work Committee the most anti-labor organization in our nation and other organizations of that type.

The AFT, of course, has had a lead in supporting legislation for education. We have worked at the state legislature as well as the national legislature in order to get additional funds for education. This has been one of our prime issues for many, many years. It happens that the funds for education at the national level were opposed for a long, long time by various presidents. President Eisenhower called a White House Conference on Education in order to get a resolution opposed to Federal Funds For Education. Finally, because we had many labor people there and AFT people,

we did get a resolution supporting funds for school construction which we needed very much at that time. Then, of course, when President Johnson came in then we got all of these Education Bills which were so helpful. President Reagan has reduced funds in practically all of these areas for education. It has been very detrimental to progress of education in the United States.

In our support of candidates, we have tried to be as democratic as we could in selection of the people that we support. In the main, the support has gone to the Democratic candidates. However, I can not remember a single slate that any group supported that did not have Republican candidates as well however, the majority of the candidates were Democratic candidates. Like now for the election in November, 1986, New York is supporting more Democrats than Republicans for the Senate of New York but they are supporting all of the Democratic candidates for the legislature in New York. This is probably in Illinois because of certain conditions the support is for Republican Governor both by labor and the AFT first time in my memory that this has happened. The support of our organization goes to those who support the principles and philosophies of the A.F. of T. and of the labor movement.

There was a movement that I should talk about in reference to merger between the AFT and the NEA. Now the NEA has always been an obstructionist towards the A.F. of T. and our program. However, I can understand that a merger of these two educational organizations would do more for education in the United States and its progress than anything I can think of. At one time it was discussed. I was with Dave Selden when we met with the leaders of the

NEA and we talked about the possibility of merger and the representative of of the NEA said, "Well we are not interested in merging with labor." We retorted that labor is our strength, it would help in a merger. The merger would be so helpful for education in America because it would mean that there would be teacher members of the merged organization in every legislative district in the nation. They could have an unusual impact upon the legislature that determined the progress of our nation in education and all other areas.

This was agreed to, however, one of the gentlemen said, "Well if we merged Al Shanker would have control of the whole organization in no time and we wouldn't want that." And Dave Selden said, "I will step down now and if you merge under our position you can have the presidency." Then they hedged and they said, "Oh no, we couldn't do that because our members wouldn't stand for it." As far as I know very little discussion has ever been made on merger since that time. The NEA said, "We will not join with the labor movement. And the AFT said, "We will lose our strength if we withdraw from the labor movement," and therefore the issue has stood without movement.

The idea that I had in mind from the very beginning was that if the AFT was going to become a viable organization it had to pursue the tried and true program philosophy of the AFL-CIO namely, collective bargaining. It was a revelation to me when I began to campaign for collective bargaining that teachers were not geared to this program.

It was in the spring of 1953 during my first year as president, I spoke to the West Suburban Teachers Union which is in the West Suburbs of Chicago

one of our big locals. They had their annual dinner and I was the speaker. There were over 500 teachers there. Because one of their teachers was fired a few years before and because the AFT and labor was able to get her job back and because she then was able to negotiate a contract with the board of education, the first one they had in that school system, I thought that this would be a very fine place for me to start with collective bargaining.

My speech was entirely on the Benefits of Collective Bargaining Tried and True Labor Philosophy. I noticed that the audience was very quiet and I thought well may be I am getting through very well. However, the minute I finished they swarmed up to the desk and said, "Megel, what are you doing? That is labor stuff. We are teachers. We are professionals. We don't want any of that labor stuff around here." So I thought, oh my goodness, I guess I have mistaken teachers and I decided that what I needed to do if we were ever going to get collective bargaining within our organization that we had to educate teachers to the needs of collective bargaining, its programs and its philosophies and what it could do. I immediately began on that campaign.

I asked the AFL-CIO locals, well I guess I hadn't, to help us on that and they did. They responded very well because they knew what collective bargaining was and they knew how effective it was. However, it wasn't until 1957 that we were able to get a local to participate in the collective bargaining process. Even though we had this first small local in East St. Louis, Illinois under collective bargaining, nothing moved until under the direction of the UFT and Al Shanker and the leaders in New York were able to effectively get a collective bargaining movement in New York City. That was

the beginning and from that time on collective bargaining moved across this nation with great rapidity. The NEA, of course, they said we don't want any part of that old labor part however, we moved forward and we were making great progress. Slowly as we did make this progress the NEA said, "Well we don't support collective bargaining but we will support professional negotiations."

They said to me, "Megel, what is this business of the NEA talking about professional negotiations?" And I said, "Well whatever name they give it if they are able by that technique to improve the salaries and working conditions of teachers and educational opportunity for boys and girls, we are all for it." So the movement proceeded quite rapidly in fact, we got to a point where we both were working simultaneously to promote the idea of collective action. Now the fact was that when we got collective bargaining even then unless we had power it would not work. The only power that we had was in a strike. Well the strike is a last that we ever wanted in the A.F. of T. However, if there was no other avenue available for progress and teachers took a vote and voted to go on strike we were phenomenally successful in settling those strikes.

I had the opportunity myself personally to settle many of those strikes where the teachers were on strike and we settled them satisfactorily and the school system benefitted thereby. In fact, one of the superintendents said that what we did was put a school system in order for two years which was absolutely true. As we were doing this, gradually the NEA came to realize that professional negotiations also wouldn't work without strikes. They called strikes. They called a strike in Florida and led the teachers down a

dirty road. They called a strike in Utah and led the teachers down a dirty road. The result was that the teachers in these areas became completely disillusioned because the NEA called a strike against the legislature in the states when the legislature wasn't even in session. It was completely wrong and couldn't serve no good purpose and many teachers were punished for going on strike by the board of education.

We were fortunate enough to be able to provide satisfactory avenues for teachers to proceed. Now you see what happened as we move along and our collective bargaining became effective and as our strikes became effective it was no longer necessary for many of us to go on strike. We could negotiate directly because we had also educated boards of education to the needs to sit down with teachers and negotiate their problems so that school systems could run smoothly. Now because this happened, the AFT through Al Shanker's participation with the Carnegie program on A Nation At Risk has moved into supporting professionalism of teachers. This of course is the issue that the NEA had for timely memorial however, they did not do much about it. It was just simply a name. It was just a tag that they said, "Oh, we are professional." Well what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything.

We now are moving in a direction where teachers can be professional. When we do the things that are outlined in A Nation At Risk and in the Carnegie program when teachers can advance because of their performance in the classrooms at which they would be paid the salary that a professional deserves. This is what makes a teacher a professional to do the things that

bring to education the philosophies and the ideals that we have all worked for, for so many years in our educational system. So the AFT is rather proud of their sponsoring of these programs. It does not mean that we are going to forget any of the techniques that we have learned in the past. What we need to do always in professionalism is translate professionalism into membership because then more and more teachers will be able to take advantage of the professional issues that we have been able to resolve.

Now some people will say, well now you are not a union anymore. We are becoming an AFL-CIO professional union. You know the doctors have had a union for a long, long time. They are not affiliated with the AFL but they are called the American Medical Association. The lawyers have had a union a strong union, you can't become a lawyer unless you are a member of the American Bar Association. They have a strong closed union so does the doctors. We in the AFT are moving in that direction so we are going to have that kind of a professional union as a part of the AFL-CIO. And also in the new movement in our nation the old line trade craft unions are slowly disappearing and that is because the craft unions are moving into other nations of the world and our employment in this nation is changing. We are in the leadership within the A.F. of T. in the leadership in that movement. What the implications are and what this moves into we have only to speculate because we can't be sure yet. But certainly as our nation changes since computers have come in the whole community of workers has changed. Fast food people have so many jobs all kinds of jobs in this country have changed and we need to be a part of that change.

The changes taking place are not the fault basically of the unions. Let's take the Steelworkers for instance. They have lost 300,000 members. Why? Because the steel companies cannot compete with the overseas steel that is coming in from Japan. Now, why is this true? Because all during the years of the war when our steel mills were going full blast, the United States government was providing the steel companies with depletion allowances. They got funds from the government to keep their plants up in good order. They did not use that money to replace their plants with new ones and the result was that after the American government gave funds to the devastated nations of the world Japan, for instance, took its money and built new furnaces which were far superior to any kind of furnace that the United States had. And the reason was because the management of the companies in the United States did not use their depletion funds to build new furnaces. The result is that Japan with their cheaper labor and with their new furnaces could make steel cheaper and better than anything could be made in this country.

If you go up to Gary or if you go to south Chicago or if you go to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh, you could see the devastation it is just tragic how all those steel mills have gone to wreck and ruin. It was a fault of management more so than the fault of anybody else. The labor movement has not yet found the key for organizing all the people who have taken jobs in other areas. First of all because they are difficult to organize. They are not in one place like a steel mill or auto factory or something like that. On the other hand, teachers must and are considering the fact that if they are going to have the kind of salaries and the money to operate the school system that they need to make the professionalism that

they are striving possible, they have got to have an interest in every single worker because that worker pays taxes that make the school system possible.

Teachers need to understand that the whole community is a part of the educational system and that their funds come from the taxes these people pay. Therefore, it makes good sense for the AFT which it is already doing to organize other school personnel, paraprofessionals, school nurses, librarians, janitors, bus drivers and to assist the labor movement in organizing any other group of workers who need organization to provide for them the basis for which the teachers have struggled so long to attain.

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