

An Interview with

DAVID SELDEN

In New York City

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

I grew up in Pontiac, Michigan an automobile town of about 100,000 population at the time I was there. Today there is no Pontiac. It has been overtaken by the suburban sprawl from Detroit. But, when I grew up there it was very much a town and the old farming aristocracy were still around. Downtown merchants controlled the public affairs of the city and General Motors could have been very influential was there but we didn't feel their weight much around in public affairs in Pontiac.

My father was a school administrator. For most of his life he was a junior high school principal in Pontiac. He got his Masters from the

University of Michigan in History. I have four younger brothers. Our home life was sort of middle class liberal midwest. And, of course, very much affected by the Depression and the events that led up to the Depression. My mother, her people were the squires of open county, farming background mainly. She was a very forceful woman. In addition to having five boys she felt that she was not doing her share in the family. During the Depression she baked bread and sold it to stores. She tried to become a writer. For a while she was cooking editor in the local newspaper and then she did some substitute teaching. She had gone to college for two years. She had become a teacher right out of high school but that only lasted a year. Then she went away to Olivet College in Michigan for a year then to Michigan State Normal College in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

My mother belonged to the DAR, was a regent of the DAR for awhile. She was a pretty staunch Republican although liberal in many of her views. There is a family story that is told that illustrates the relationship between her and my father and the rest of us. It was at some sort of party right after Truman's election. My mother remarked to the assembled, "She did not know anyone who had voted for Truman, she just could not understand it." Whereupon my father said, "I did." We were I would say a bunch of individuals. Our home life had a certain intellectual base to it that I guess stayed with all of us all our lives.

On graduation from high school, I went to Michigan State University and graduated in 1932. I went to Michigan State for a year then I got married to my high school sweetheart. We went back to Pontiac and I went to work as

best I could. During the following year, I counted up one time I had 23 different jobs some of them simultaneously because they were only part-time jobs, of course, I worked in the auto plants during that period. I worked at General Motors Truck and I worked at Pontiac Motor Car. The work was not steady 2 or 3 months at a time and in between I was a plumbers helper. I sold overalls and other things for Sears. Played in the beer gardens that were springing up after prohibition had been voted out. I played banjo. I remember very well we played from 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. on Saturday nights. We got \$3.00 a piece for it. Everything was cheaper then including the musicians. Furthermore, I don't think we were very good.

My main extracurricular activity beside from earning a living then was reading. During high school I did not read very much. So that I was really quite ignorant when I graduated from high school. But I hung out down to the library and I checked out books all the time and I particularly read books by H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, the Webbs, other people from a British Socialist movement. I was interested in them particularly Wells who was a much better writer than people ever gave him credit for being. A book which I recall actually made me cry a book called the "Bobington of Bobe." I don't know exactly how I got started reading the Fabian Socialists of England because I really had no class feeling at that time. I had no class resentment. I was not very much interested in national politics either after all this is only 1934. I was two years out of high school and trying to provide a living for myself and my wife.

During the year I stayed out of college between WEPA, and my wife was on WEPA too, and working all these various jobs I managed to save up \$350.00. With that I went back to school. Only, I did not go to Michigan State this time I went to Michigan State Normal College at Ypsilanti because it was cheaper and because I had decided by that time to become a teacher. I managed to finish up my final four years in three, and in 1936 I actually became a teacher. By that time I had become much more interested in social political questions and economic questions. I never was much of a Marxist. I read Marx, I say it with a little temerity because I don't feel that I am an adequate critic, but I felt that his arguments were flawed really so although as a result mainly of my reading I became a philosophical socialist I was not really a Marxist and I did not belong to any socialist group and while I knew a lot of people who had views similar to mine they did not call themselves Socialists. They did not belong to any organized group either. About the closest thing that I came to it was in 1939 when I joined the American Federation of Teachers.

The founders of our local in Dearborn - by that time I had become a teacher - Dearborn is a suburb of Detroit. The founders of the union were almost all Socialists of one kind or another. There may have been a couple of Communists in the group. At least there were a couple of people who were suspected to be Communists. There were many people who belonged to a grocery cooperative that we had in Dearborn. There were others who belonged to other sorts of liberal movements. By this time of course, Roosevelt had become president and Roosevelt had certainly did change the political map of the United States.

For a person who did not live in Michigan in the 1930's it may be surprising that a person such as I coming from a liberal middle class background could hold to be such a strong union believing person and also a socialist. I think that mainly it was the time, the atmosphere, there was no television then but there was a lot of radio and there were many programs on the radio that stimulated speculation about political and economic social subjects. For instance, twenty-five miles away from me was Father Corvin at the Church of the Little Flower. He had a following a right wing following in Michigan and we used to discuss Corvin. I can remember some of the things he could say to this day. I used to listen to him mainly so I could argue with people who were supporters of his. There was a lot of discussion at the grassroots.

Norman Thomas came to Michigan and came to Pontiac while I was working at the Pontiac Motor Company. By the way, there was no union in the old plants at that time. The CIO had not been formed. The CIO could not get started until 1936. I didn't relate to Norman Thomas, however, because of what I consider to be a quibble that he made a big point. He said that auto workers were working for .5c an hour. I know that I was getting about .65c an hour at that time but he went on to explain that you had to count the time that you spent on the unemployment line. When you add that in it was too big a jump for me to make. I was not opposed to Norman Thomas or anything of that kind I just felt that he had not dealt with the problem frankly in a convincing way.

Of course, two American authors I think were very influential one was Belmese, "Looking Backward" which influenced so many millions of people and I believe it was my father who advised me to read "Looking Backward." Another person who had a big influence on me was First and Devlin, I read everything I could find of his, I thought he was a pretty great philosopher. I much preferred him to Marx because he sighted as examples things that were occuring or had occurred in the United States. But, socialism was largely a theoretical concept with me and may be it still is.

Even unemployment was largely a statistic because the federal programs that Roosevelt put into effect were really quite widespread in Michigan and in Pontiac. There may have been people sleeping in the streets and I am sure there were people who were hungry but I don't think it had the impact that it must have had for people living in the big cities in the United States.

I began teaching in Dearborn in 1936 this began really my active political life. Soon after I began teaching there I was involved in forming a local of the AFT. The AFT in Michigan was centered around the activities of the Elders - Arthur and Renette Elder who lived in Detroit. They turned their house into a union headquarters. They must of had phone bills of hundreds of dollars every month because they kept in touch with probably every AFT member throughout the state. The Elders were interested in me and through them I became involved in Workers Education, Local 600 of the UAW.

People may wonder why I became active in the AFT. It is a peculiar thing. As I said I was a theoretical socialist by the time I began teaching in Dearborn. But I had never belonged to a union. I had never worked in any

place where there was a union. I knew about the AFT, however, because my father as principal of the junior high school used to come home with stories about what the damned AFT had done. But, I was opened-minded about it and I did not form an opinion at that time.

When the local was being started in Dearborn, I was not the instigator of the local, some of the other people who were more socialist I guess than I was were. We only needed seven people to sign a charter application, in those days. And, they came to me with the charter application with six signatures on it and they said we need just one more before we can send it in to Chicago where the national headquarters of the union was at that time. And, so I said all right. I couldn't really say no. These people were friends of mine and also certainly was in accordance with my principles and things I had been talking about for several years so I signed. Within about six months, I found that I was president of the union and we had about thirty members in the system. I enjoyed positions of leadership, always had and I felt that I could accomplish things. I always had perhaps grandiose ideas, but at any rate in this case Dearborn worked out quite well.

Tenure in Michigan was by local option. You had to have a vote by the people unless the school board voluntarily wanted to give people tenure. We did not have tenure and so the union set out on a campaign to get tenure for the teachers of Dearborn. It was kicked off. I wrote an open letter to the school board protesting free appointments that the school board had made to administrative positions in the school system. Now in most school districts

except in the very large cities, the superintendent can appoint anybody he wants to any position he wants to and all he needs is the approval of the Board of Education. There were no examinations or anything of that kind to limit him. So, in this case three people were appointed who in the opinion of most teachers were not at all qualified for these jobs. They were petty jobs assistant principal, elementary school principal and so on.

I wrote an open letter protesting the action of the Board. I said it was politically motivated and various kinds of outrage and I sent copies of the letter to the Detroit papers. At that time there were three Detroit papers and they all ran a pretty good story in their Sunday edition. On Monday, the superintendent called up my principal and my principal saw me and said that the superintendent wanted to see me in his office immediately. So, I refused to go. I said, no I had to teach here now unless he wants to talk to me in connection with my teaching I am going to stay here. So, a compromise was struck. I was to come over after school. Which I did. The superintendent tried to get me to modify and write another letter saying that is what I really meant. I refused to do it and it is at that point, I think that the union took seriously the idea of tenure for teachers in Dearborn.

We organized a very good campaign to register voters and to get them to vote for tenure in the coming school board election. However, before the election could be held the Board of Education fired one person without any hearing of anything, suspended him without pay. And, also one of the teachers and older woman teacher was intimidated by a school board member who when she was taking a petition around to get tenure on the ballot. These two

incidents incensed many teachers. We ended up running three people for the school board in the same election that our tenure proposal would be up.

To mount the campaign for the school board, we formed a chapter of Labors Nonpartisan League which later developed into the Committee on Political Education. But, at that time Labors Nonpartisan League was almost entirely a CIO operation. We managed to get about seven other unions in town to join with us in Labors Nonpartisan League. One of the union's was Local 600 which by that time as a result of the war effort had gone to about 60,000 members. We had by that time about 60 members in the Teachers Union. There was a Painters Union in town of about 15 members. Bus Drivers I believe had about 100 members and there were a few other building trades members union in town. We managed to paste it together and make a Labors Nonpartisan League out of it. We ran a very aggressive campaign on the School Board election and on the tenure proposal.

When the votes were counted it was discovered that we had lost narrowly all the school board members but tenure had carried also narrowly. The law is written though in such a way that before tenure became effective after it had been approved there is a 60 day period when the school board could fire at will any teacher i.e. they could dismiss any teacher without any cause at all so that they could go into the tenure period properly cleansed. There was some discussion on what to do about that. Finally, I went up to the board of education at an open meeting and said we had heard rumors that they were planning to run a purge of the teachers before going into tenure. They

were planning on dismissing certain people who had been too active in the campaign. As a union we felt that we had every right to participate in the election and we had every right to initiate the campaign for tenure and we wanted to know just what their intentions were. They were completely dumbfounded and surprised by this attack. So one by one the members of the board of education said they had no plan like that at all that no one was going to lose his job. Well, I am not sure what their plans really were but I don't think they were all that pure.

By the way, I have not made clear when we scored this victory we had about 60 members in the union but there are about 450 members in the district. So, we still had the organizational problem of the union. That was solved in a unique way. There was a teachers club. It was a local branch of the Michigan Education Association. We all belonged to the 10 Association as well as to the Union. We had to belong to the Association or at least we thought we did so we all joined. It only cost a couple of dollars a year. So, we hit upon the idea of running a union slate in the teachers club election and we did that. We ran a union person for every vacancy except presidency. The president was a rather popular person and anyway we felt that he would be harmless enough if he was surrounded by union people. We won every position except the position of president. We also made it clear while we were running in writing that if we were elected we would vote the Association out of existence. Just to make sure we ran a referendum that could have backfired but no the teachers voted to discontinue the Association and that was it. This may seem weird to people who know teachers and their supposed conservative natures but actually it wasn't, it was perfectly natural.

The Union had been doing things the Association had not either at the state level or locally. Local 600 of the UAW had during this period become the bargaining agent for the Ford Rudge Plant which was within the school district. The State of Michigan had had a very liberal Governor called Frank Murphy who later became a Supreme Court justice. A remarkable man. And the climate, in spite of the fact that every newspaper as far as I know was opposed to unionism absolutely flat out opposed. Some of them very viciously so. The state had accepted the idea of unionism and Dearborn along with them. Well, of course, Dearborn was a blue collar town in those days. And the Fordson school district there was only 1 of 5 school districts in the whole city of Dearborn and the people in Dearborn the adults were largely foreign born - Romanians, Hungarians, Syrians, Turks and Caicos, Arabians a lot of Mesopotamians and many nationalities. It was strictly a blue collar town.

Today, of course, it is different. I along with other members of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers have to accept some of the blame for this. We set about consolidating the various school districts in Dearborn this is entirely a teacher move. The enticement for this among the other 4 school districts within the town was a fact that the Folgen School District, my school district had the entire assessed valuation of the Ford Rudge<sup>ouse</sup> Plant. These other districts by amalgamating with Fordson District would pick up the right they would participate in the tax benefits of the Rudge Plant. So, the school district became amalgamated and the city did to and the thing happened

which none of us really foresaw in those days. It became a racist town and it is to this day. There are no blacks living in Dearborn. It was a very sad thing for me and for a lot of other people that this happened. In the city of Dearborn, there was a Mayor named Orville Hubbard who ran on a program of keeping Dearborn white and he incredibly remained mayor for nearly 30 years. It was purely a political ploy. I knew Orville Hubbard fairly well - it was only a political thing he had no strong personal beliefs. He could have believed anything if he thought it would get him additional votes. It was not racist but I believe it could have done more to eliminate racism from the city of Dearborn.

Hubbard was a very clever politician and he had backed the union when the union was first getting started. He was not in either, he was not mayor at that point but he used what political influence he had run for Congress as a Republican two or three times before he became mayor. It was mainly just a political ploy on his part but once it had gotten started it seemed impossible to get rid of it. The union did take positions against the racist residential policies in Dearborn. It did try to do something about it but I don't think enough. I say that accepting full probability even though I was not in Dearborn at the time. Of course racism was not new to Dearborn. It did not originate with Orville Hubbard.

The Ford Motor Company when it was putting up the Rudge Plant bought huge tracks of land on which houses were built. A section was reserved for blacks. That became a town called Inkster. Dearborn was reserved for whites. The Ford Motor Company actually started the policy but it was

Hubbard who maintained it for a period of 30 years from sometime in the early 40's until the mid 60's. Of course the consolidation of Dearborn in some respects was a search for the lowest common denominator because there has always been a Dearborn, a self contained little city. It really was not a suburb of Detroit as it later became. It had a business district of its own. Maybe it still does, I don't know because I have not been there in a while. A sort of community life that existed but there were mostly whites the blacks lives in Inkster and I think that the consolidation of the school district and the consolidation of the various litte townships around the original city of Dearborn simply encrusted the social situation.

With the addition of each new city and school district it became that much harder to become more of an open system. I finally left the union early in January, 1943 when I went in the Navy. I was president when I went in. For a little while, I kept writing articles for the paper and things of that kind as though I never left town but someone had the grace to call me up and let me know that was not the way to do things. I ought to win the war first then come back and if I wanted to I could be president again in Dearborn. Anyway, so I quit.

After the war I did not return to Dearborn because I did not return to teaching. I had a chance to do a lot of thinking. I was not sure that I wanted to be in the position to be so influential with my students. I think I may have overestimated the amount of influence I had on my students. But, I was a popular teacher and I made no bones about my own socialists beliefs.

I always gave the socialist point of view on anything that came up all the time explaining what I was doing and presenting other arguments as best I could. After a while, I began to wonder if I was taking advantage of these young people and so I did not return to teaching.

I tried to become an X-ray salesman and serviceman in Jacksonville, Florida. I was not very successful doing this I did not sell a single X-ray machine. I was working at this job as on-the-job training provided for under the GI Bill of Rights. I did learn quite a bit about X-ray machines and later when the time in development hit the United States, I was better informed than most people about radiation. After struggling with this on-the-job training for about a year and a half - I can't remember now - it may have been more, I decided to try and get back into teaching. But this time I thought I would try to get a job at the college level. I was interviewed for a couple of jobs that I was interested in but I never succeeded in landing a job. I even tried to found a college along with a Methodist minister I met as a result of my efforts to try and get a job at the college level.

Florida Junior College is kind of interesting in one respect. The whole thing was based on trying to buy Camp Gordon Johnson which was listed as surplus property by the federal government. Educational institutions could get a 95% discount on anything that was on the surplus list. We wanted the college. Some of the local people had been involved in an annual camp meeting, a religious camp meeting that included some churches from south Georgia and the person who owned the property on which the tent had been put up. The camp meeting sold the land to somebody else who was not interested in

having a camp meeting and so we needed some other place. That is how we got started on Florida Junior College.

The interesting thing about it beside from what applies to this subject is in order to, I think, we would need about 500 students. In order to start the college there were buildings on the land at Camp Gordon Johnson. They could be converted into classrooms, administrative offices and so on. But we needed students. I set up a cooperative scheme. I wrote to all the cooperative colleges in the United States, Blackburn, Antioch and a number of other colleges and asked them to send me their plans and I told them what we were trying to do and I got quite a bit of response. Out of this, I devised a scheme for a labor bank and student labor would be able to do all the things at the college and so on. It was truly a cooperative college we had planned. Unfortunately, a man from Ohio showed up in Caraval driving a DeSoto station wagon. He said he was going to start a pottery on the campgrounds if he got it. He announced that he was going to try and take over that property our property. He is dangerous. I think the 80th Congress which Robert Taft from Ohio was really running the government.

Senator Taft the Taft of the Taft Hartley Act. We had a bitter contest with this fellow who came to town. Finally the day of the auction of the property came up. The camp was awarded not to us although we had the higher proper bid. But we did not bid on certain parts of the camp. It was put up in 13 parcels we bid on only 12. This man bid on it all. He did not put in separate bids for each parcel, in accordance with the instructions, but his

overall bid was bigger than ours and the camp was awarded to him. He kept the camp for about 6 months until Florida Junior College was completely disbanded and he sold the property to DuPont who owned all the land surrounding the camp. And, today Camp Gordon Johnson is covered with pine trees like all the other DuPont land in that area.

One of the people who had been interested in the Florida Junior College project was a man named Burns, who was the principal of a 6 room school around the other side of the state at a place called Oak Hill. He saved a job for me because I think that he felt we were not going to succeed. If we did, and I was not available, he could get somebody else to come in there and fill my job. For a year I taught in Oak Hill, Florida. Taught 8 and 9 grade English mainly and had a rather enjoyable time. I also was at that particular time trying to become a writer and I did write some childrens stories which I sold. I was far from achieving any real success in that field.

At the end of that year, my wife and I and our daughter moved to New York and I got a job teaching near Peekskill, New York. As far as I could see I was settled down to what I was going to be doing for the rest of my life. Then I got a call from some people back in Dearborn who offered me a job as Executive Secretary of the Michigan Federation of Teachers. They made the offer on the basis of what I had done in Dearborn. I leaped at the chance of doing that even though the pay was less than I was making as a teacher. I really got excited about this idea. But weeks and months went by and I did not hear anything more after I had applied for the job and I finally thought

well they have got somebody else for the job. But what actually happened is after talking with me they found out about two other vacancies that were opening up on the AFL organizing staff. The AFL at that time had a number of organizers and assigned them out to various internationals to help weak internationals organize. The AFT was certainly qualified as a weak international. I think we had about 35,000 members nationally or may be less. We probably claimed 35,000 and that was about 1949.

For the next three years I became a roving organizer. I was known as the eastern organizer and I had everything that came up from Lincoln, Nebraska east. Gradually in my travels to school district to school district I decided that we had to do a better job of organizing and we had to concentrate our forces in such a way that we could be constantly building some strength. So I proposed what I call the area organizing plan and it was finally adopted. Only one area, however, was ever set up and I was the organizer in that area. It consisted of New York state, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. After I had done that for a year or so trying to organize within those states. That was very small territory compared to what I had before. I conceived the idea of splitting that area in two making two districts by adding states to the north and to the south. New York would then be pared with Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. I don't know if Massachusetts was in it at the time. It was Rhode Island and Connecticut. Pennsylvania and New Jersey would be combined with Maryland which had a local in Baltimore and the District of Columbia which had two locals at the time.

The national executive council agreed to that and we began trying to put that into effect. In effect someone else would take my job on the AFL staff

and I would take this first area organizing job and that is the way it worked out. The AFL was a relatively conservative organization. It was very suspicious and antagonistic to the CIO. The charge constantly was thrown up to the CIO that it was dominated by communists. Of course, no one ever made that charge against the AFL. I found I went to a lot of Central Labor Council meetings in many different states. I gave speeches at those meetings about organizing teachers and having the support of the labor movement. And generally speaking they usually did what was asked if it did not cost too much money. The teachers themselves were really not providing the kind of leadership that was needed.

If you look at the background of almost any union whether it is Garment Workers or Auto Workers or Rubber Workers or Carpenters you would find that leadership mostly came from within the working group. And if teachers themselves could not provide the kind of leadership that would merit the support of the labor movement they really had no one to blame but themselves. I don't want to be overly critical of leadership of the AFT because the job was a tremendously difficult one and education is so decentralized that it is hard for any national movement to gain any momentum.

In New York City we had a group of people working in the New York Teachers Guild who were the best teachers in the system in many respects yet they really didn't take hold of the key to organizing teachers. Their main opposition in the 30's and 40's particularly was provided by the teachers union which was a militant group and did concern itself with social issues but they did not do any better either. As a matter of fact for one reason or

another they lost membership throughout the 40's while the Guild did gain slightly during that time. I don't know whether it was circumstances or whether it was just the right combination of organizing policies had not been put into effect. I do think that latter reason had something to do with it. People in the Guild were just too nice in many respects. They were not tough enough about organizing the union to pull it off. And it took really a sort of different kind of campaign which we really did not get mounted until after the mid 1950's.

It took a different sort of campaign to organize teachers in New York. What happened here happened in all the other cities. So if you could not get a movement going in the bigger school districts in the world, how could you hope to succeed in "center"? A certain maturation process was necessary. Nobody had any answers really. The concept of becoming the exclusive representative of teachers first had to be accepted. For various reasons the Guild was more or less reconciled to being one of a dozen dominant teachers organizations in New York City and that seemed to be power enough to many people. It allowed the organization to retain its individuality and at the same time it did achieve a certain position of respect among teachers. So, I think the first thing that had to be done was that the leaders in the Guild had to accept the concept of collective bargaining with an exclusive bargaining agent elected to represent all teachers. Since the Guild, at that time or the UFT even had less than 5,000 members, I have forgotten how many and there were 45,000 teachers in the system many people feared the nonunion votes would simply swamp all the union votes. So they opposed the whole idea

of collective bargaining on that ground. No one argued that collective bargaining was not appropriate for teachers or anything they did not want to lose the election.

Leaders of the Teachers Guild who really became the leaders of the UFT eventually also had been so accustomed to their minority status within the school district that they did not believe that they could ever become an organization of power and to achieve majority status. So, it was a certain lack of faith in themselves and a certain caution bred from experience. I did not think there was an ideological hangup with collective bargaining or there were some people who may have been a little shakey on the strike issue. But even there, I think they were leary of strikes because they felt that the city and the state had so much power that it would not be possible to win in a head-on clash. I think we had, with the exception of some of the leaders of the teachers union, the best leaders in the school system within the Teachers Guild and of course within the UFT after the amalgamation. I think that the Guild leadership had an intellectual class which was lacking in all the other teacher organizations that I know again with the possible exception of the teachers union.

There were some people there who had intellectual class. Fortunately, for the UFT not enough of them to make a difference in the result in the collective bargaining campaign. The rise of teacher militancy is an important study in itself. If I were to write a sequel to the teacher rebellion I might write a general book about teacher militancy because there

are many instances of teacher militancy that occurred throughout the nation but are largely forgotten today.

There is a theory, I believe the ~~Shank~~minites may have espoused this theory but I don't know exactly where it originates. There is a theory among left wing people that rebellious movements have to mature. There has to be an escalation that you can't announce a revolution will start at twelve o'clock tomorrow and expect it is going to happen. That is really a part of the whole story. There were many militant incidents in the schools following World War Two. There had been many before but there had never been any concerted incidents. These are scattered incidents. In many districts one day strikes, demonstrations, student strikes not all happening at once but enough so that they added up.

You have got to credit Myron Lieberman for calling attention to this. His doctoral thesis, I believe was written on "Teacher Militancy" in which he sighted, I don't know how many but 40 or 50 incidents of teacher militancy during the late 1940's. These gave a certain credibility. Almost all of these he pointed out were winning efforts by teachers. The idea that the state or the school board or the superintendent could step in and crush the whole thing any rebellious movement of teachers was proven to be false. In most cases if the teachers stuck together, they won. I was influenced by Lieberman's writings and I know that Shanker was because he called them to my attention.

As the 40's came to a close and the 1950's limped in, teachers became more and more militant. The quiescent state policies of the associations

were no longer adequate for the problems. The problems confronting teachers were getting more and more severe. I think mainly the problem of the society itself. Schools actually mirrored a society unless they exist.

Following World War II all the old restraints good and bad were removed or relaxed. Discipline by church had been removed, racism had been combatted, Amos and Andy were no longer popular on TV, yet racism served as a curb it kept blacks from asserting themselves because they were afraid of what would happen to them. The 50's are viewed as a dormant time but they really were not it was a great gestation period for the civil rights movement. Helped immensely by the Supreme Court decision Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. There are many other things that were happening in America. It was becoming increasingly urbanized. People going from rural areas into the city. Society was less and less able to cope with the every day problems of life and all these problems came right in to the school room.

Teachers are being asked to cope with conditions in the school with no better tools and no better conditions in the schools. Relatively, no better salaries than they had before when teaching was a lot easier and a lot more satisfying. Teachers became increasingly resentful of the difficulties they had to confront every day in the classroom. And, of course, as the difficulties increased teachers became more militant and willing to undertake more militant actions to try to bring about improved conditions.

The baby boom had its effect. Of course, it contributed to overcrowding in classes and half day school sessions in many school districts. In New York City it overloaded the elementary schools and led the legislature to just arbitrarily change the salary schedule so that elementary school teachers were making as much money as high school teachers and that was a big change because high school teachers regarded themselves as the elite in the school system and the legislature.

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There was a big change because high school teachers regarded themselves as the elite of the school system and the legislature in effect knew that better than anybody else. Almost anything that contributes to the anger of people always contributes to militancy that was certainly true in New York City. In other big cities there was not a single salary issue or question of whether it was taken for granted that high school teachers and elementary school teachers would be paid on the same salary schedule. They had plenty to gripe about too and feel frustrated about. The same baby boom situation that prevailed in New York City also prevailed in other places and it caused many of the same problems.

The deterioration of social discipline occurred in other places just as it did in New York. By the end of the 50's, I would say that teachers across the nation were really ready. There was a certain level of militancy. A certain acceptance of militant ideas and teachers had grown accustomed to militant action of one kind or another. Of course, it would take another 10 years before they would grow accustomed enough to strike without having shivers going up and down their backs. At any rate, they were on their way.

The breakthrough in collective bargaining in New York City was probably the most crucial event that ever occurred in the history of the AFT. It

meant a lot more than it would have meant in Dearborn say or some other small town because New York City had critical mass. The impact of this election in New York City was tremendous. It had reverberations within the AFT and also in the relationship of the AFT with the NEA. The membership of the AFT in December, 1961 when New York City won its collective bargaining election was about 65,000 members. In New York City alone there was a potential of at that time of 45,000 members. We did not achieve that level until 2 or 3 years later but it was there. People within the AFT recognized it and also people within the NEA recognized it too. Whereas before, the NEA leaders had been able to simply brush off the AFT as just a kind of a nuisance now they began to take the organization seriously.

Meanwhile, the national organization of the AFT was really skeletal. We had a full-time president Carl Megel and we had 4 or 5 organizers I can't remember just how many. Al Shanker was one of them, however. He was put on the payroll and it became obvious that we had a good chance to win the bargaining election. Megel was foresighted enough to understand what was at stake and got the organization to set up a position which Shanker ended up filling. One important thing is the new element of teachers which came about as a reorganization of the Guild into the United Federation of Teachers. It is referred to as a merger but actually, it was so far as a merger is concerned, it was done with mirrors as a result it was a new and enlarged union in New York City for teachers. Charlie Cogen was still president of it but there were many militant high school and junior high school teachers who

came in as a result of the reorganization of the Teachers Guild. Rightly or wrongly, the Guild had been viewed by many teachers as rather pink tea and not very aggressive.

When new people came in, of course, militancy feeds on itself and the more militants who came in to the organization as a result of the reorganization to the UFT the more militant the organization became. The increased militancy which resulted from the reorganization of the Teachers Guild and a strike in the evening high school which occurred at that time was a key factor in causing the reorganized Guild known as the United Federation of Teachers, AFT causing the UFT to win the bargaining election in December, 1961.

When the UFT, after winning that election, went on to win a collective bargaining election and conducted a couple of strikes the militancy in New York City spread across the nation and most of the big cities. When I say that the UFT collective bargaining victory was crucial to the AFT, I am not doing that to denigrate in any way the work that was done in other cities like Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City and so on. They worked just as hard and were just as brave as the people in New York City. But, they lacked the critical mass and did not have a certain militancy in the beginning like the people in New York did. The New York people led the way. The rebellion began in New York and it was fed possibly from the New York well spring.

When we first started to negotiate in New York City, no one really had any idea of where we were going. We had to fumble our way along and yet we were conscious that what we did would be setting precedence because the whole

idea of collective bargaining for teachers was so new. Bit by bit we created the model of collective bargaining which pretty much exists the same way today across the United States. It is the idea of no contract no work of timing our strikes if they become necessary for the beginning of the school year. The arguments for adopting these positions, by the way are contained in my book, "The Teacher Rebellion" which was published in 1985 by Howard Univesity Press. Furthermore the multi-year contract the first militant people to say they don't have anything but a one-year contract when they began talking that way I always thought about what I read about The Waddleys. Part of the Waddleys area was that they did not want any contract at all. They wanted an unlimited right to strike. If things did not suit them they would quit work. If you have a one year contract in a school system that mentions whether the school kept or not it was a rather uncertain and iffy proposition.

We first went for a two-year contract then we finally went to a pattern of three years and most contracts across the United States are now three year contracts. That is an accepted standard. We also refused to accept any limits on the scope of bargaining, that is what could be bargained. That question was never settled. The Boards of Education claimed that there are limits to what can be bargained. We say we can bargain for anything we can bargain for so we refused to accept any formal limits. Of course, the Boards argument is such teachers can not be policymakers. Teachers have to implement policy which is adopted by the Board of Education or the Superintendent of Schools or his staff.

The argument we used in that very first set of negotiations was that if teachers gave up that right they would be giving up their professional right. Professionals are hired to do a job in accordance with the way they think it should be done. So teachers were different from other workers in that they had more rights than other workers. That is they had the right to collective bargaining with an employer in addition there could be no limits on the subjects which could be collectively bargained. We were not saying that individual teachers did not have the right to determine educational policy. We just said that through the union, there was no subject that would be barred from negotiations. Of course, that is a little different approach from an AMA approach. The AMA approach is an individualistic approach it sets up a situation through the hospitals and through the local medical association which disciplines individual members. They must follow the rules that are set up by AMA but doesn't involve negotiations with anybody. There have been doctors strikes in Canada particularly. I don't know if there have been any in the United States or not. But in Canada they have had a strike in Ontario last summer which they lost. The strike was over this interesting thing. Fees were set by the Province of Ontario. The doctors were demanding the right to charge more than the fees. They wanted to regard the fees as minimum charges. The government said no, you will have to charge the fees that we set.

There had been negotiations previously and the doctors had agreed to the fees but this particular point had never been clarified and through a technicality they insisted they had that right all along. The strike went on. Really kind of a slowdown. Not a complete strike because once a few

people started dying because the doctor refused to go and take care of them, I think they probably would have lost their strike anyway. They tried to set up a situation that would not create too good a public outcry and at the same time would establish their right to charge more fees than the official schedule set up through negotiations with the government. They lost. They had to go back. They called off their action finally but they did not say they would not do it again.

The term professionals applied to teachers does not have the same meaning when doctors use the term. Doctors interpret professional as being the right to use their individual judgment in the treatment of any of their cases. Nobody can interfere with them. They don't want to be sued for any mistakes they make. When the term is applied to teachers - really under collective bargaining - it has to mean that there is no subject which is barred from collective bargaining. You can't automatically foreclose bargaining on something that affects teachers in the performance of their work. But, it is still a collective decision that is made and the bargain which is reached between the employer and the union. The term professional as it is used in the collective bargaining differs a great deal from the way it was used before collective bargaining.

When the AFT was formed back during World War I it scared the pants off administrators. For years they had felt they were absolute bosses within their school districts and schools. I used to say that a principal regards himself as a captain of a ship and if he had a chance he would perform

marriages too. They used the term professional to mean that you do what your principal tells you to do or the superintendent of schools. If you do that you will be truly professional and you will be rewarded just like doctors and lawyers who are also professionals.

For people who are repelled by the notion of taking militant action this is a rather comforting doctrine. They fall behind this idea. I can't strike. I can't picket. I can't speak out in school board meetings because it is not professional. So that means that they don't have to do any of those disagreeable things which nobody likes to do. The idea of being professional was promoted by the administrators of the American school system as a way of keeping teachers under control. Of course, another way it was promoted, it was unprofessional not to belong to the Association.

The Association was the professional group and the AFT was a union. In my book I have a paragraph which I contrast the unionists with a professional person. A unionist gets his hands dirty in his work. A professional has clean work, never has to wash his hands during the day if he doesn't want to. He has certain status. He belongs to the more prestigious organizations. He is a member of the ~~Knights~~ <sup>Kiwanis</sup> Club. He is a professional. If he is a teacher he does not belong to any of those things. He goes to the right churches and he is a professional, a doctor or a lawyer. If he is a teacher he may belong to a church that is not as prestigious as some of the others and so it goes. But, so it goes you can get the idea.

What was being promoted by the Association was a mystique which had no reality or very little reality to it. Under collective bargaining when you

talk about being professional, you talk about having a voice in determining the policies under which children are taught. It is just as simple as that and that voice is heard through the process of collective bargaining. We are not saying that because you are professional you ought to be paid more than other people. I never make that argument. I don't think that has any validity whatever.

The idea of being professional under collective bargaining simply applies to the scope of bargaining. There is nothing precluded from what you can talk about at the bargaining table. If you have enough power at the bargaining table, you will be able to come away with agreements on matters which might be regarded as professional. If you don't have it, well you don't have it. In other words the appeal of professionalism is really a status appeal. How to get above the status of worker? In order to do that under most systems that have been set up - in order to become a quasi administrator or a lead teacher or a super teacher or whatever, you can't do that through the union. A sort of bureaucratic system has to be set up where you would take a further examination or fulfill some other formal qualifications or may be chosen by a committee to go up into this higher status. Whether or not you advance within the system has nothing to do under that sort of a system. Has nothing at all to do with unionism and collective bargaining. As a matter of fact it is probably destructive of collective bargaining.

In the New York City system, where employment is based on an examination system at any given time there are probably from 5,000 to 10,000 people

involved in examinations for what are called higher license that is administrative licenses. They are working their way through the parts of the examination which usually take about a year - various parts to the examination. There are some parts of the examination which are absolute eliminations and there are others where you just scored and that is figured in the final score in most of the examinations.

People who are involved in that process the thing that concerns them most in life is whether they will pass the next part of the examination. Many of these people are people of exceptional ability comparatively speaking. Many of them have been strong contributors to union life. Once they get involved with the examination process and the advancement process their objectives become different. They are interested in their personal advancement and their main concern is whether they will pass the next part of the examination. They are not interested in the union anymore. Of course, this undermines the militancy of the union.

You recall that I said that what you take away from the bargaining table depends upon the strength that you do bring to the bargaining table. If you have some of the best people in the school system no longer interested in the union they are mainly interested in their personal advancement within the bureaucracy, it means that you are weakened at the bargaining table. I know from my experience in New York that in militant actions unless those actions can be shown to be in the interest of administrators almost always they are on the other side. They are on the management side. They don't like to have the status quo set because they are doing all right with the status quo.

Collective bargaining began in New York in 1962 when we got our first contract. By the end of the 60's there were hundreds of collective bargaining contracts across the nation. There were at least 30 state laws authorizing collective bargaining for teachers. That is a tremendous development. On the surface, it seems like the rebellion accomplished a great deal. The peculiar thing about it is that conditions in the schools did not change all that much. I often wondered why the rebellion was not able to go ahead and change the structure of education in a way. We know for instance, anyone looking at education knows that the way education is financed is simply crazy.

Having local school districts raise the basic taxes, means that big tax payers search out the school districts with low tax rates and where they can more or less control the budgets of the school systems. The larger more developed school districts are deprived of the authority to tax. It results in all sorts of inequities in terms of the money that schools have to provide educational services. Most state aid formulas do attempt to compensate for this differentiation. They attempt to compensate for this differential from one school district to another. But, it only in approximation. It doesn't really do the job. In the legislature the distribution of school aid money is always a big political adventure. The quality of education is very uneven across the United States. There are other things affecting the school which are important too which are branished by the fact that we adhere to this local governance of schools. For instance, racial integration.

Racial segregation was outlawed by the Supreme Court in Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 but local conditions in many areas of the United States such as Dearborn for instance are such that there is no integration within the schools. Furthermore, many of the educational practices in the school districts tend to resegregate children once they get to school.

At any rate as a union we have not been able to do anything about this and the NEA which has probably done a little better job of educating its members on these questions hasn't used its great strength which it could use hasn't exerted its strengths to change conditions. You probably have to say looking at the situation that the rising tide of collective bargaining slowed during the early 70's and probably came to a halt by the end of the decade to the 70's. Collective bargaining has not been able to adapt and to tackle the really tough questions in education. This is true, I think mainly to the way the two teacher organizations are organized.

First of all why are there two teacher organizations? The same teachers would be in either one sometimes in both. There is no reason for having two teacher organizations because there are different kinds of teachers one place or another. There is no reason for having two teacher organizations because they compete with each other. They really don't compete with each other. Each organization spends millions of dollars every year sending organizers out in the field to conduct essentially what are political campaigns.

The differences between one organization and another are usually very slight. So having two teacher organizations is destructive in the long run to the advancement of the collective bargaining movement. As long as

collective bargaining is restricted to the local level and as long as local school boards really don't have the power to bring about major changes in education, collective bargaining can only go so far. What is needed is multilevel bargaining. Not only bargaining at the local level but bargaining at the state level and the national level as well. Of course, this can't be done without having the two organizations amalgamated.

One of the problems of having two teacher organizations it complicates almost everything you do. You have to think what the effect of what you do will have on the competition between the two organizations. I know that both the NEA and the AFT are guilty of this. Very often, positions are taken mainly for political effect in order to differentiate one organization from the other rather than on the basis of what is best for teachers and children. One example, that comes to mind is setting up the National Department of Education. I am of two minds about this in view of the effect of what has happened - well you will see.

The AFT opposed establishing the National Department of Education. They thought that education ought to be left in the same National Department as Health and Welfare. The NEA had for a long time maybe 20 years been advocating the establishment of a Federal Department of Education. It seemed really in my heart of hearts, I had some doubts about the AFT position. Probably establishing a National Department of Education I thought would be good for the schools because it might give the schools more prestige, more attention, we might be able to get more money out of Congress if we had a

National Department of Education. Also, we would be able to establish national policies that would affect the quality of education.

In the light of what has happened since the creation of the National Department of Education it is really kind of interesting. There is a little bit of a side but I think it is germane because in my own mind I have been thinking about it - well this is what is involved here. A National Secretary of Education is responsible to the person who appoints him, the President. So it was quite natural that when there was an opportunity to appoint a National Secretary of Education political considerations entered in.

The first National Secretary of Education was Terrell Bell. President Carter had recommended establishing the National Department of Education and the first Secretary of Education was Terrell Bell. I think the fact that Bell was from Utah and the senators from Utah were rather influential probably had a bearing on the selection of Bell.

When Reagan came in Reagan had run on the platform to abolish the Department of Education. As a part of that campaign to redeem that campaign policy Reagan tried to play a little politics with the two organizations. He saw that he exploit the difference the fact that there were two different national organizations. For instance, the NEA had been a strong advocate of the Department of Education and against abolishing the Department. Reagan began acting in a very friendly way with Al Shanker, President of the AFT. He thought he could exploit the differences between the two organizations. There may have been something to it because, of course, the person who was

editor of the American Teacher was later chosen by Reagan to become the National Secretary of the Civil Rights Commission.

At any rate Bell had picked up - I wouldn't say that I was friendly with Bell but I had talked with him at various times, I knew him reasonably well and I had suggested that if Reagan wanted to abolish the Department of Education that was not all that bad. We can set up the Department of Education as an independent arm sort of like the Tennessee Valley Authority with a commission in charge of it. The commission would then select a National Superintendent of Education. In retrospect I think that was a great idea because specifically to insulate the Secretary of Education from the President. Because, at the present time, we have a Secretary of Education who does not believe in education as we knew it.

He is firmly in favor of cutting the national support of education. I don't think that the AFT's position of leaving education as part of Health, Education and Welfare was very good either because when it comes to a choice between Secretary Bennett and Secretary Weinberger, I don't think you have too much to choose from. If education could have been set up as a separate commission, I think that would have been a sort of foundation for the type of organization insulated from the President.

This illustrates the problems we are having to teacher organizations. That problem was not resolved on its merits. It is still not really resolved but I think it probably from now on education will be a political issue.

What I had in mind when I began talking about multilevel bargaining before I became President of the AFT actually, sometime in 1966 or 1967 was the UAW the automobile industry. The UAW bargains with the automobile companies on three different levels, a nationwide level, a division or company level and the plant level. It is not anything unusual about it and they are able to handle it.

I once asked Walter Reuther what he thought was the best way to go about this when I was thinking about multilevel bargaining. I said is it better to start the bargaining at the local level bargain with the plant level first then go to the company level then go to the national level. He said well we have tried it three ways. We have tried it from the top down. From the bottom up. And in the middle and going both ways. He said there is really no good way. But, if you are going to have company strikes you really have to concentrate your bargaining at the company level.

With teachers when I say company level, I mean in so far as the education system is concerned, the state system. I have never heard either organization talk about state strikes let alone a national strike. It is quite obvious, I think that the utility of the local strike is really quite limited. Only so much money can be raised by the local school board through property taxation. I don't know of any school board that has any other form of taxation. It might be a good idea to begin advocating school boards being given the power to enact local income taxes. At any rate, I don't know of any of them that do that.

You quickly exhaust the possibilities at the local level and you reach a point where it is really not worthwhile to strike both for what it does to the school system on the one hand and what can be gained on the other. The logical conclusion of this is that you have to organize yourself in such a way that you can conduct statewide strikes.

Under Reagan, the amount of federal contribution to local school districts has declined so severely that the idea of a national strike does not really excite anybody anymore. Strikes are still effective in resolving impasses. But, they really have limited utility in terms of what can be done at the local level. What happens when areas adopt collective bargaining or states adopt collective bargaining? It follows a rather typical course. At the start, the sort of strike or a short strike is sufficient to get a contract and the gains are usually quite good for both teachers and children.

As experience with collective bargaining goes on the Boards get more sophisticated. They don't fear strikes anymore. They adapt the strikebreaking methods. Other employees have learned to adapt. The effectiveness of the strike declines. It is still necessary - it would be impossible to have collective bargaining without the right to strike or the ability to strike. A lot of places have the right to strike but don't have the ability to carry one on.

What has happened is that collective bargaining has matured. We are really only bargaining for a part of the pie now because we are not bargaining at the state and federal level. Of course, we do carry on

legislative activity like lobbying activity in all the states and at the national level but, you are up against a different situation in lobbying. And lobbying, you are competing with all organizations and people who don't want to raise taxes and who don't want to give money to the schools. If you create a confrontation through a strike threat or through a strike then you force the decision on the basis - well do you want schools to operate or not - this is the only weapon ultimately that any group of workers has.

One of the problems that has confronted me as the collective bargaining movement rocked along - successful collective bargaining is really dependent upon the militancy of the union. The militancy of the union is also dependent upon - it is an emotional thing and most people can't stay mad forever. Some can stay mad for a long time. There is a limit to it. You can't artificially pump it up all the time year after year. Also, as experience accumulates you begin to establish regular ways of doing things and more things become staff functions and the union does a lot of things that it never was able to do before. You hire people to take care of those things and pretty soon the organization becomes bureaucratized.

My definition of bureaucracy is a situation where the organization becomes more important than its purpose and that is what really happens. People go into the office and they do a day's work and they come home and one day is pretty much like another. They are comfortable with a situation that they have worked out and no excitement or creativity is generated by the situation and the organization suffers. It just inevitably happens. This is not original with me Max Saver pointed this out a long time ago and Michelle too

in discussing the Social Democratic Party of Germany points out how that party became bureaucratized and weakened and almost devoid of militancy.

It applies to any organization. It happens in any organization. You can generalize on it. And, it happened to the AFT. The bigger the organization, of course, the more bureaucracy is necessary. You cannot have a union or any organization run like a mass attack on Bunker Hill or something of that kind. Things have to be organized and you have to have responsibility fixed and so on. There is a lot to be said for a bureaucracy. The bureaucratic attitude is a dangerous thing for an organization that depends upon militancy for its power.

The development of collective bargaining as described in my book and in books that other people have written about the period. There has not been any really adequate description of the political development inside the union. The AFT developed a caucus system during the late 1930's. The cause of it was the fear of communist domination of the union. Socialist types and the just plain ordinary teachers joined together in an organization which came to be called the Progressive Caucus.

Initially, they were pretty well united in the 1940's because they wanted to expel the teachers union of New York and also another local down in Philadelphia and a third local some place else, I have forgotten and this they accomplished. There was agreement also that we would have a more or less figurehead president. George S. Counts of Teachers College was chosen to head the organization because he was in addition to being a great man

himself, he was person of an excellent reputation and was in the educational establishment. So, Counts allowed himself to be nominated for president of the AFT and was chosen and elected in 1940 I think or 1941.

Presidents served one year terms at that point in the history of the organization. At the same time though, it was decided that the real head of the organization would be the National Executive Secretary. The Executive Council of the AFT would choose an Executive Secretary. I don't know whether this fellow was a first but I think he was the first Executive Secretary. Irving R. <sup>Kuenzli</sup> ~~Kingsley~~ from Springfield, Ohio became Executive Secretary of the AFT. He was hired full-time and he ran the organization for about 10 years. Under his regime, the power in the union resided in Chicago and Cleveland.

Membership during this period was around 30,000 and most of the members were from Chicago, Cleveland and some other mid western cities. Chicago and Cleveland were the only two cities where we had a majority in membership in the whole country. The rest of the membership was well scattered. The original united front to expel the communists began to fall apart in the 1940's and the two caucuses were then established. One was the National Caucus and the other one was the Progressive Caucus. They were about equal strength.

The Progressive Caucus gained the upper hand. We went into an election in 1952 when some members of the Michigan delegation were accused of voting the caucus and voting for the National candidate because of some personal difference within the Progressive Caucus and so the National Caucus won. The winner of that election was Carl Megel. Megel had been nominated because he

was Vice-President of the Chicago Teachers Union at the time. If John Fewkes, President of the Chicago Teachers Union had felt there was any chance of winning that election, he would have run himself. But he let Megel run as sort of a caretaker candidate. Megel won. Megel proved to be a wily politician very adept at gathering majorities from the various regional and other blocks within the AFT. He stayed in as President of the AFT for about 12 years. He stayed in until 1964 when Cogen became president.

When Megel became president in 1952 one of the first things he did was to change the system. The Executive Secretary was no longer the acting head of the organization. The President became the acting head and also Megel since he was living in Chicago and had no other job anyway, became full time President of the AFT. Little by little he began to construct the organization. During the next 12 years while he was president the national organization grew. It doubled I would say in membership just about over 12 years. Considering the size of the organization it is not all that surprising, but he worked at it steadily and laid the basis I think for the collective bargaining era which is to follow.

Megel did not have the ability to seize a national issue which would excite people and to exploit it. I remember when we were well into the collective bargaining campaign in New York there was a threatened withholding of contracts by the teachers in Utah, of all places. It was a very militant action for them to take, however, it was really promoted by the principals who would benefit from this situation. It involved the teachers refusing to

return their contracts and if they did not have them returned by September then the schools would still continue to operate but the teachers would not have contracts with the school systems. So, it really was not a strike but it came across nationwide as a very militant action involving a whole state.

It caught my imagination anyway. I called Megel and I said, "You ought to send a telegram to the Utah teachers congratulating them on their vigorous action and offer to be of any possible assistance and wishing them the best of good fortune in their action." Well, he couldn't see that he was opposed to it and never did do it. He simply saw it in terms of the competition between the two organizations. We should not ever admit that the other organization did anything worthwhile. I was not advocating this telegram of support for what it would do for the NEA. I was advocating what it could do for the AFT that we would be the champions of teacher militancy. Up to this point the NEA had said nothing at all about the Utah situation. It is an example, I think of what happens in a division that still exists between the two organizations. Also, I don't think I do Carl Megel any real disservice by pointing this out that he did not understand the organizing value of exploiting an issue of this kind. A target of opportunity sort of thing. It was a window of vulnerability that was not going to remain open very often, very long and I thought we should have taken advantage of it.

Megel kept getting reelected with different groups supporting him each time. One year he would have the support of the Chicago Teachers Union which was still the biggest union in the AFT by far and, another year he would campaign against the Chicago Teachers Union. It was amusing, I found it amusing and all the time the union kept growing. It was growing really as a

result of the growth at the grassroots level. We were beginning to engage in some kind of demonstrations and protests but there was still no talk of strike. At one time, the AFT actually passed a resolution at a convention opposing strikes unless certain conditions had been fulfilled. And they were conditions that would never be fulfilled. Some people say that resolution was passed, I really don't know this but it was interesting that the resolution was passed so that we would be eligible to receive federal funds for certain projects that we had in mind. I don't know whether that was true or not, but that is the way it was told to me.

The AFT during the 1950's was pretty much typical of its time. It did a little bit of this and a little bit of that and not enough of anything. For instance, while we did pass resolutions at our national conventions opposing McCarthyism, we really did not do much about it. Probably the reason for that was that McCarthyism was felt most severely in New York and possibly New Jersey. New York and the Teachers Guild was so opposed to the Teachers Union that any national organization would not want to alienate one of the biggest locals, so Megel more or less let matters take their course.

So far as the teachers in New York City which were victims of McCarthyism - interestingly enough - when I first came to the Guild office, a fellow came in one day and showed me his credentials. He was from the FBI and he wanted to look in our files. I asked the person who was Executive Secretary of the

Guild what about that and I was told, yes we would let them do that. I said well I feel kind of funny about it. I don't think I will do it. I think I will try and get rid of this fellow, so I did.

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DAVID SELDEN INTERVIEW

January 20, 1987

Tape 3

The addition of the United Federation of Teachers to the AFT made a profound difference in the internal politics of the organization. For many years the Chicago Teachers Union had been the largest local union within the AFT. By putting together locals such as Chicago, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, St. Paul and Minneapolis, you could control the local politics of the organization. Of course, they were rarely together. Sometimes they were and sometimes they weren't. There was a lot of shifting around between the National Caucus and the Progressive Caucus.

When the UFT came in, it was not long before about one-third of the membership of the organization was in the UFT. If New York and Chicago decided they were going to do something that was it. There was not much that other locals could do.

When Cogen became president in 1964, it was by a very narrow margin. Megel had read the handwriting on the wall and so he had arranged to have himself made Washington Representative which he thought was a very good job. It was a good job. He handled lobbying for the AFT. This left a vacuum and Cogen ran for President and he was very nearly beaten by Charles Smith who ran from Gary. Gary had been a strong local for a long time. Smith, whom I

got to know very well later was really an excellent candidate. A liberal and gutsy union person, perhaps he was using the Steelworkers as his model, I don't know, but that is possible.

With the UFT in the politics, Cogen squeaked through in the 1964 election with I think it was something like 29 votes. He would not have won the election had not the sole delegate from Los Angeles who was carrying all the locals vote gone to sleep in his room and neglected to vote. He had enough votes to tip the election the other way.

Cogen's second election in 1966 was a runaway. There was a situation in the voting at the AFT Convention in the caucus system had bothered me for a number of years. It was a custom not to nominate a whole slate but to leave two spots vacant on each slate. The idea was that the individuals on the slate would be left free to make deals with a couple of people on the other side. Everyone knew this, it was encouraged and there was a lot of horse trading that went on at the Convention. It bothered me because it placed people who did that sort of thing in a very anomalous situation. I insisted that the Progressive Caucus put up a full slate in 1966. They did and the entire slate of Progressives won. By the way I did not mention I guess the national office was located in Chicago at that time. In 1964 when Charlie became President, I became Assistant to the President.

In Chicago with the national organization, I fulfilled very much the same sort of function that I had been carrying out in New York. Cogen and I had a

kind of a love-hate relationship. We argued frequently and sometimes quite bitterly. Since I was the initiator of most of these proposals, it lead to arguments and I won most of those arguments I think. Although sometimes when I lost an argument over a policy question or an action or something of that kind, I would let it ride for awhile and bring it up again later.

During the Cogen years, the four years that Cogen was national president, I think it is fair enough to say that it was a pretty active partnership. Cogen had many personal attributes that I did not possess. He was a much better speaker than I. He was a lawyer and had a kind of a lawyerly turn of mind. On the other hand, I had a more volatile personality and a more militant attitude towards the union during that period or perhaps forever.

I became president myself in 1968 and I remained president until 1974 when I was defeated by Al Shanker. Meanwhile, the politics within the organization became overwhelmingly Progressive Caucus. We merely had won 15 vice-presidential slots in 1966 the total votes between the Progressive Caucus and the National Caucus was still 45-55 or something of that kind in percentage points. As the organization grew in New York and neighboring areas to New York and finally throughout New York State, a situation evolved where a majority of the union was in New York State. That is no longer true. But it was true up to perhaps 1975. Gradually, the number of teachers in New York City and other employees was cut due to budgetary problems. As other cities and school districts around the country achieved collective bargaining status with AFT representation, the percentage of New York comprised of the total numbers changes and today it is probably about, if you

count the whole state as a unit, it is probably about 35% in New York and the membership elsewhere counting for the rest of the membership.

The Progressive Caucus originally was not very ideological except that it was strongly anti-communist. When Cogen ran in 1964 as a beginning, I guess you would call it of his campaign, I set up a national committee against Goldwaterism. We had a custom or a rule, I can't remember which, where we did not make outright endorsements and so to get around this I used this Goldwaterism. This rather cautious approach to national politics outside the AFT later was strengthened until in 1972 the union endorsed George McGovern for the presidency. We probably should have endorsed Hubert Humphrey in 1968 because Humphrey, although he was never very active at all always claimed membership in the AFT. He did not pay his dues so we made him an honorary member.

He had been a teacher before he got into politics. In Tulane, I think somewhere down there in Louisiana. How he got down there I don't know. He made a big thing of his AFT membership when he was Mayor of Minneapolis because the AFT was strong in Minneapolis. It was an asset in his career as Mayor of Minneapolis.

Today, of course, the Progressive Caucus is just overwhelmingly in control of the AFT and New York which votes as a caucus - there is no opposition caucus within New York that amounts to anything. New York really dominates the AFT through the caucus system. When questions come before the AFT Convention, they are discussed first in the Progressive Caucus meeting. The positions are voted in the Progressive Caucus meeting and then the

delegates which includes about 80% of the delegates of the convention, they vote according to the position taken by the Caucus. The result is that New York has an inordinate amount of influence if not downright control of policy of the AFT. For instance, up until about 1972 voting on roll call votes by delegates to AFT Conventions was secret. The votes were totaled but no one could tell how any individual voted.

I think the thing that first got Shanker excited about this situation was he was in a caucus meeting of the Progressive Caucus and some of the delegates were sitting at the back of the room and laughing when some issue was being discussed in the caucus. I believe they were black delegates. There was a Black Caucus but the Black Caucus did not operate as an open power voting caucus within the AFT. The members of the Black Caucus were members of both caucuses the National Caucus and the Progressive Caucus. While they would use their positions within the caucuses to try to get preference for black proposals when it came to voting out on the floor they would follow their particular caucuses position.

Shanker felt that was not happening. How could you tell? You could not tell how the delegates were voting. I said, "Al, I think you are needlessly excited about this." We have been winning the votes. We don't have to have every vote." And I am reminded of Roosevelt who is charted for accepting the support of the communists in 1936. Roosevelt took the attitude well, if they want to vote for me let them do it. But, Al was not satisfied. At the next convention was an amendment to the Constitution requiring open votes on all recorded votes on all roll calls, so that no delegates vote could be secret.

There were pluses and minuses about this question but unbalance although I initially did not fight it at least to any great extent. I now favor closed voting. I think that the delegate has a right to vote as he sees fit and he ought not be put in a position to be intimidated as he is with the open voting. It is too much like the Teamsters or some other union that is known for its roughhouse tactics to have the delegates subject to the kind of pressures that exist now. The present system of open voting within the AFT is really undemocratic I believe at the present time.

It should be pointed out too that the NEA system has some flaws in it. The NEA has no national caucuses. The delegates caucus by state. There are influential people within each state sometimes manipulated by the executive secretary of the state. They take positions. They take votes within their state caucuses. So a minority caucus never gets a showing because they are out voted in every state and the result of that is that even though there are closed votes, the vote is far more lopsided as it turns out than it really is in terms of the opinions of the delegates. I have talked with friends within the NEA several times and said why don't you guys form a national caucus? Why don't you get out of platform and campaign for it and try to establish a movement within the NEA. They all agreed with me or some of them do at least but when it comes to doing something about it, it doesn't seem to get anywhere.

At the NEA Convention it is possible to pass resolutions that are much more liberal than the AFT within the NEA convention. It is possible to do it and they have done it particularly on issues as war and peace and on some

economic issues. I think of an example on the question of unemployment but it does not occur to me right now. On the question of war and peace we did support all the anti-nuclear demonstrations and they supported the big peace march in New York City June 12, 1962 and the AFT as did the AFL-CIO did not take a position on it. They did not take a position because there was no power within the AFT because of the caucus system that could bring it to a vote and win it on the floor of the convention.

The AFT has not become involved in the issues of our day given the extent that they were say back in the 40's and 50's. For instance, in those days the AFT took very strong positions on racial questions. This does not happen anymore. I don't know what the present position of the AFT is on affirmative action, but I hardly think it is favorable. What has happened over the years, the position that the New York local the UFT takes on these social questions of our day, those positions become the positions of the AFT nationwide and I don't believe that really is representative.

The thing that the caucus system does - it really doesn't prevent a majority from being heard but it prevents any substantial minority position from being heard. To me, that is very undemocratic because eventually minority positions sometimes become the majority positions. They have the right to freedom of speech. Some people say, "Why should the union get mixed up in these social questions? Why not just concern themselves with 'professional' questions things that concern education strictly?" A humorous reference perhaps some people in the Catholic Church take the position that the Bishop shouldn't get involved with the questions of nuclear policy or economics or racial matters.

I think that part of a reason to have a labor movement to have a union at all is to change society. I always said that the AFT had a triple purpose.

One was the union just like any other union dedicated to getting more money and better conditions for its members and others similarly situated.

Two that it was an educational reform movement. That it was intended to change the schools in such a way to make them more responsive of greater social value.

Third it was a social change agent as well. It had to be dedicated to the perfectibility of American society and perhaps the society of the whole world.

I think if you accept that tripartite purpose of the AFT then you have to get involved in the nuts and bolts of those questions. An interesting example is this. Initially, although we didn't actually take a position but there was a strong feeling within the AFT of opposition to ERA even though most of our members are women. Even today, the AFT sends a delegation to CLUW, the labor union women's organization. They take rather conservative stands when they go and kind of stand apart from the delegates from some of the other organizations.

Another example is the Vietnam War. The AFT never did pass a resolution opposing the Vietnam War even though I am quite sure that a majority of the

members were opposed to the War at least by 1970. Another example may be the position of the AFT in regard to the Vietnam War. The AFT worked for the election of Kennedy and during his curtailed administration was when the American involvement in Vietnam began. So, having formed that the regional leaders of the AFT having gone along with the leaders of the AFL-CIO in support of Kennedy and the Vietnam intervention took something to change that opinion.

In 1968 although the AFT did not endorse Hubert Humphrey, if a vote had been taken within the union I think they would have endorsed Hubert Humphrey certainly over Richard Nixon who was never any friend of teachers. Later on though, in 1969 I proposed a resolution to the convention. I had originally supported the war but there were two things that switched me around on the Vietnam War. One was Bobby Kennedy's speeches. I felt his arguments which were not the strongest in the world but they were in general opposition to American involvement in Vietnam. I thought that if Bobby Kennedy could take that position, may be I ought to examine my own position. The second thing that switched me around was a lengthy conversation I had with an AFT leader in San Francisco his name was Al Tapson. He was a college teacher. He was a Major in the Army Reserve and his son was a Green Beret. Al Tapson was flat out opposed to the Vietnam War and in my long conversation with him he gave me the reasons. I won't bother to go into that but he knew the history of the area and all sorts of things that I did not have any knowledge of at all.

In 1969 Tapson and I, Tapson was a Vice-President in the AFT, introduced a resolution in the Executive Council opposing the War. That was endorsed by a narrow vote within the AFT Executive Council and it was reported out to the

floor of the convention. By 1969 the New York local had gotten its act together and they sent a very large number of delegates down to the convention. I think the total convention ran about 1,500 delegates and they had about 300 people there. Physically as well as on roll call votes, they could have tremendous impact on the convention. They also teamed up with some other locals notably Philadelphia to oppose the resolution. In 1969 the resolution did not carry.

In 1970 the same resolution came up again or a similar one. I took the floor and argued in favor of the resolution opposing the war. I stepped down from the podium to do it. My argument was while I had supported the containment policy originally, I had come to believe that you could not contain an idea with an army. I felt that the Vietnam cause was a lost cause as far as we were concerned and therefore we should withdraw.

A week after the convention had adjourned, Shanker submitted another resolution which he could do under the AFT Constitution which would say if passed that the AFT should take no position on the war. So you had two resolutions. One opposing the war and one that the AFT should take no position. Both resolutions passed narrowly. I had scheduled a press conference in Washington to release the results of the referendum and this was certainly a quandary. There was no clear cut thing I could say, so I gave the results of the election to the reporters who had come to pick it up and they asked me then what does this mean. I said it means that a narrow majority of the members would prefer that we take no vote at all. That if we were to take a vote we should be also narrowly opposed to the war.

A lot of people might say well why should the union be concerned with a question like this. It reminds me of an interesting story. When James Allen was U.S. Commissioner of Education, he had just been appointed. He called a staff meeting and at the staff meeting he introduced himself and said how he felt that the Office of Education ought to run and then he did what turned out to be a big mistake. He had a question period. This was during the Nixon administration. James Allen had been Commissioner of Education for the State of New York before he became National Commissioner of Education.

The first question he was asked was didn't he think that the Vietnam War was harmful to American education because it was costing a lot of money, it was alarming children and it was endangering college students? He gave all those reasons as you might think that do impinge rather seriously on education. So, Allen thought a minute and said yes. Well, that afternoon the story goes, he was summoned to the White House and fired. It is true. He was fired all right whether it was that afternoon or not I do not know. The questioner and Allen agreed with the questioner and if the Commissioner of Education who was not noted for being any great liberal thought that the war was bad for education and children certainly the union that represented teachers ought to be opposed to the war.

The question might be asked that if the union should take a position on political matters or on social issues does that mean all political matters and all social issues or what rules should apply. I think setting union policy is pretty much a political act you have to use your judgment. If a

politician were to take stands on every issue that came along, I don't think he would stay elected very long because he would alienate so many people that it just would not be possible. But there are some issues, for instance, the civil rights issues that came up during the 50's and 60's that it was impossible to stay out of and if you had stayed out of it would have been a black mark against the union from then on. There are some things that you have to take positions on and there are other things that come up of a political or social issue nature that you don't have to take positions on but taking positions on them may benefit you. You may accumulate support for taking positions on some issues.

I don't think that you can make any rules that will stick in every situation. There is no rule against using your brains when you are making judgments. Of course, it is important not to be frivolous in the actions you take and to as much as possible to be sincere. I remember once I got a letter from somebody complaining about the AFT being favorable to Israel and why was it that the AFT was favorable to Israel? This was sometime while I was still President of the AFT. My reply was three things I think as I recall. One was that the former government in Israel although flawed was a democracy while all the Arab countries were covered by heredity rulers or military rulers. We had friendly relations with Israel for some period of time and we really owed it to Israel to support them wherever possible. For the teachers union of the United States to support Israel, I think, I pointed out that the teachers in Israel were organized in two unions. Both unions are affiliated with various international organizations that we belong to and

there was a fraternal relationship that counted for something and there were no affiliated organizations from the Islamic world. I don't know. I guess I would not have minded publishing the letter and the reply in the American Teacher but I didn't do it. I did not do it either, I just satisfied myself with the answer to the letter that was sent to me. But I thought about it several times in the past and maybe I should have made the letter and the reply public.

I could have generalized on the situation and said that wherever possible we would be in favor of governments that adhere to democratic principles and that are friendly to the United States. If the country had a well developed labor movement, I would think that we would have some obligation to stand solidly with the members of that union.

I was elected President of the AFT in Cleveland in August, 1968. I did an unusual thing, I ran on a very specific platform. Most candidates for president in the AFT don't lay out a platform, things that they expect to accomplish. If they say anything at all about their candidacy, they mainly talk in big generalities. Instead, I said that my main effort if I were elected President would be to merge the AFT and the NEA.

Many people were shocked even though I had said this privately for a number of years. I spelled it out. I said that education really could not be greatly improved without adding about one-third to the cost of education. Neither the AFT nor the NEA alone had enough strength and power to force the governments involved to come up with the money to make it possible to put in the kinds of improvements that I was talking about.

Here we were setting up goals for class size of 20 and 25 children in a classroom that alone would have required an increase of about one-third in the total cost of education to hire the teachers necessary to do this. I did the thing in a proper way. I went through the Progressive Caucus and sought the nomination of the Progressive Caucus since I had the support of Al Shanker and the New York local, that was a foregone conclusion.

When I went into the convention, the candidates for President were allowed I think 5 minutes each to give a campaign speech. Convention agendas are very crowded so I devoted my 5 minutes entirely to the merger question. There were 2 other candidates one was a person to the right of me from Minneapolis a nice enough guy and a good unionist but he really did not have much of a platform. Most of his platform consisted of bringing about more cooperation with the staff. That has some significance because in 1970 the staff person who had been assigned to Minneapolis ran against me for President. It shows that even back at that time, he had been talking to people about the relationship between the staff and me. Incidentally, that representative's name was Ken Meeson and there is an interesting coincidence which says absolutely no significance with this story.

I taught in a Salinas School in Dearborn, Michigan for six and one-half years and lo and behold Ken Meeson had taught in a Salina School too. It was no connection with what happened later. And, furthermore, while Meeson in most respects was a good organizer and a very effective one any specific job you gave to him. I don't know what his commitment to the labor movement

was. When he had an opportunity to get a job with an Insurance Company he took it because he did not have any job by that time, he had lost the election. So, I am sure that made the insurance job attractive to him. But as far as I know, he is still selling insurance.

The other candidate was a black woman from Detroit who was really a very impressive woman. Beautiful and her name was Sileen Richard. The 2 of them got about 49% of the vote. I had won a clear majority of the vote in the election and so I became President. Afterwards Sileen quit teaching and went to work for a city agency I believe in Detroit, and I think she is still there.

Running on this particular platform, I believed so strongly that the time had come for the two organizations to join together. Each had strengths that the other lacked. Together the whole teacher militancy movement would be greatly strengthened. In the first place I really believed in it. I did not think it was a ploy. The members don't vote for the president. The delegates vote at the convention. Since, I already had the support of the Progressive Caucus or when I went into the Progressive Caucus I had taken sounding so I knew pretty much that I had it in the bag so to speak. I felt that I could win and carry this point even though it seemed very strange to a lot of people who had been spending many years fighting the NEA.

My selection as the candidate of the Progressive Caucus was partly just plain politics. I went out beforehand and lined up votes and the major blocks were in the Progressive Caucus. I really out did myself in my talk to the Progressive Caucus about becoming the candidate. Then told afterwards

that I rally sold people on the merger idea. You will find people around the AFT who still remember that and who were swayed in their thinking by the arguments I presented at that time.

When I got to be president, I did start out to approach the NEA but I will cover that when I get into the whole question of merger. First thing that I tackled was to reorganize staff which I had been doing while I had been assistant to Cogen. We added a department - the State Federations Department - we did various things to strengthen the staff. We hired some additional organizers and so far as the organization was concerned it was growing so rapidly and since organizing had been the one problem of the AFT, I was really quite exhilarated by the whole situation.

The height of our organizing campaign was a time which I call the Co-Organization plan or COOG for short. I loved to create these made up words. I did it while I was in the UFT as Director of Organization. I coined the term ADCOM which is still used which means Administrative Committee and other things like that - you have to have some fun sometimes.

The COOG plan came about in this way. Nick Zonarich, the Director of Organization for the Industrial Union Department, gave a speech to the 1964 AFT Convention and he said that the IUD was willing to match us dollar for dollar in order to raise a \$1 million organizing fund. That meant we had to some way or other raise \$500,000. And if we did, we would get \$500,000 from the IUD. I knew that the IUD had the \$500,000 and I also knew that we did not have it.

We managed to raise it in a number of ways. One way was by borrowing. Even though many people were afraid of borrowing money, it was such a shakey enterprise, as the AFT I pushed ahead on it. We sold bonds, I think they paid 4% or 5% interest at that time in 1964. We raised all total from our borrowing about \$400,000. Those bonds were short-term bonds. I think they were 3-year bonds. When they became due we simply offered to refund the bonds with higher interest rates - what seems very low now. It was very attractive to people who put \$10,000 to \$15,000 into these bonds and they got every nickel back that they ever put in. Anyway, that was one method that we used.

We also forced state federations and locals to raise dues in order to qualify for a return. By bookkeeping transaction, we could work things out so this was no great strain on people. We would set up a budget for a collective bargaining campaign. Then we would lend this would be a one-third, one-third, one-third deal. A third from the AFT, a third from the state federation and a third from the local. Then the AFT, since by this time I had presented this plan to the IUD and gotten approval for it that meant that we had a lot of money. We would turn around and lend the local and the state federation the monies for their share. They would still owe it, however if we won the election there would be no problem. They could raise the money and we would go on to the next campaign. Some of them lost, of course, we finally in some cases just wrote it off as bad debts.

Organizing was just a constant preoccupation along with the merger problem. Another interest that I had all along was the state of the labor movement itself. I had become quite skeptical about the labor movements general method of operation. I had many clashes with many different labor leaders because I felt that they were not progressive enough were not providing the support they perhaps could and they thought too much about their political positions in general and not enough about the labor movement. One of labors heroes was Walter Reuther.

Before I became assistant to Charlie in New York, I had never met Walter Reuther even though I had done a lot of labor education classes for Local 600 of the UAW. Never met Reuther. I had been to many meetings where he presided and talked so I knew his method of operation very well. He was a very compelling speaker. Although, Reuther always said that no Reuther ever gave a speech in less than an hour and a half and that was true once he got started he didn't stop. Unlike some other long-winded speakers, Hubert Humphrey I am thinking of Hubert Humphrey presented his speeches about four or five times before he ever ended it before he stopped talking. Reuther's speeches were well crafted. They had a beginning and a middle and an end to them. Usually, he had an important point that he was trying to get across.

Before I became AFT President, Reuther had pulled the UAW out of the AFL-CIO. I had talked with Jack Conway, who was the Executive Director of the Industrial Union Department which the UAW belonged to. Before the UAW pulled out, I said you fellows are going to do whatever you do but I will have to tell you quite honestly that I can't join you in this. We are going

to stay in the AFL-CIO even though they had helped us with three-quarters of a million dollars for organizing purposes and even though I was personally friendly with Conway and many of the other people in the UAW.

Why I did not try to get the AFT to pull out of the AFL-CIO? In the first place, I don't think I could have done it. There were so many people in the AFT who had connections with local labor leaders that it would not have been possible to swing the whole AFT. For instance, in Chicago the union was very close to the Chicago labor movement, Minneapolis, St. Paul and many of the bigger locals in the country were close to the labor movements in their area so it would not have been possible. There was an even more overriding issue and that was that every AFT local depended upon its local labor movement and that meant the AFL-CIO to provide additional support for its periodic disputes with the local board of education.

It would have been a terribly disruptive thing for the AFT to try to pull out. There was no way we could have done it. Nevertheless, I remained friendly with the people in the AFL-CIO. I think after 1969, after I was president of the AFT a year, I went to an AFL-CIO Convention in Atlantic City. The AFL-CIO had expelled the Chemical Workers and a couple of other unions whose names I have forgotten now because they had taken organizing assistance from the UAW and the Teamsters who had formed a temporary alliance at that time. I thought that was outrageous to expel these unions. I knew what it was to need money for organizing. Here is the Chemical Workers union in an organizing situation in competition with at least five other International Unions. In order to survive, and let alone expand, they needed

money to pay organizers, and paying bills and postage and all the things that go into an organizing campaign. I did not blame them a bit for taking that money.

At the AFL-CIO Convention, I got up on the floor and defended the unions who had been expelled. I knew what I was doing. I knew that this would bring down the wrath of the Meany machine and it did. I said something to the effect that the labor movement should help each other. The law of the jungle should not apply. It should not be an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, you would never be able to build any unity in the movement that way. I remember Lane Kirkland getting up and heaping scorn on me for advocating forbearance as he called it. Also, Paul Hall of the Seafarers Union who is now dead got up and accused the Chemical Union as being a Judas and selling out the labor movement for 30 pieces of silver.

All that is ridiculous, of course. It does illustrate a kind of an overriding principle of my experience in the AFT and in the labor movement in general that I was always in favor of unity. I was never in favor of emphasizing the things that tended to split people apart. I think that accounts too for the fact that I was never a strong anti-communist. I was never a communist myself and I certainly did not approve of the policies they advocated although I did approve of many that they did advocate. I tried not to engage in these bitter blood feuds that go on in the labor movement and have done a great deal of harm to the labor movement.

That convention had another significant action. There were a number of vacancies in the National Executive Council and there would be people nominated - selected by the Meany administration to fill those vacancies. There was never really a free election in an AFL-CIO Convention. It is pretty well decided beforehand.

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DAVID SELDEN INTERVIEW

January 21, 1987

Tape 4

The question of whether or not the AFT should nominate someone for one of those vacancies on the AFL-CIO Council came up of the AFT delegates. There were 9 or 10 delegates and, I at the time did not think we ought to nominate anyone. My reaction, I did not really approve of the Meany policies although I recognized many of them I did. George Meany's overall reactive attitude towards the organization rather than what could have been a positive program of leadership in the Reuther style. I felt that the AFT should be a kind of loyal opposition within the AFL-CIO and, therefore, I did not want to ask any favors of Meany because if the favors were granted I would be part of the machine.

The delegates did not get my point. I felt that we really ought to be independent of the machine, if you want to use that term, and so I did not want to ask him any favors. However, the delegates there although constitutionally it could not have been binding, nevertheless, they said we ought to nominate somebody. Normally, you would think that would be the president but since I had also made it clear that I did not want the organization to be associated too closely with Meany, this was twisted around to become interpreted as a personal thing that I did not like Meany personally. Personally, I admired the old bastard. I thought a lot of his

positions were well taken. Some of the positions that people did not appreciate very much. At any rate, someone, I believe it was Carl Megel, who was a delegate said, "Oh well Dave, you don't want to be a vice-president may be how about Al?" Al did not say anything and I couldn't seem to straighten it out. I don't know, perhaps I should have made a greater effort or thought a little harder at that particular point.

The upshot of the meeting was that Al became our nominee for vice-presidency on the AFL-CIO Executive Council. In accordance with the wishes of the delegates, I went up and approached Meany before the next meeting of the Council got under way. I explained to him that we wanted to nominate someone to be a vice-president and that would be Al Shanker. And you know, Meany looked at me very intently and said, "Are you sure that is what you want?" I said, "Well that is what we voted." My relations with Meany over the years were always pretty good. Meany had a good sense of humor. I got a kick out of his jokes. His quipps that he would make.

While I was working in New York, I had problems. He never was in favor of any of the strikes that we called, but luckily the local labor movement gave us pretty good support. They were not all that enthused about some of the things we did either because they felt that we were disrupting their relationship with the political powers within New York City. One interesting contact that I had with the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO involved the Supervisors Union. There was no supervisors union to start out with but the time of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike, the Council Supervisory

Associations in New York City gave support to the United Federation of Teachers. That support was very much appreciated because the strike went on for 15 weeks and the strike was a very nasty one with a lot of racial conflict involved in it.

Following that strike, the Council Supervisory Association decided that they would like to become affiliated with the AFL-CIO. At a meeting of the AFT Executive Committee, Shanker brought up the question without taking a stand. However, I had information from somebody in New York that he had actually made a commitment to the Council Supervisory Association. He would favor their affiliation. So somewhat mischievously I said, "Al do you want to make the motion to reject that proposal to agree to allow the Supervisors to have AFL-CIO affiliation?" Al, caught unawares I guess said, "Oh yeah that's right so I'll make the motion." Then I went up for the AFL-CIO Executive Council to try to argue against granting the charter to the Supervisory organization. I made my pitch, made it as strongly as I could. Several members of the Council, nevertheless, said that they had supervisors in their union and they found it very helpful. In one way or another I suppose they helped them to organize members under their supervision. In the course of this conversation, this discussion of the Council, Meany leaned over to Kirkland and said, "I thought you had this all fixed up." Kirkland said something that I did not catch in reply. At any rate, the vote carried to grant them their charter so that is how they got their charter.

I felt then and I still feel that a boss is a boss. When people accept positions which put them in charge of other people and they have the power to determine really the working conditions of other people sometimes the tenure

in their jobs that they have removed themselves from a position in which they could carry out any solidarity with the body of workers. Almost always in the strikes that we have conducted around the country with rare exceptions, the supervisor, the principals, the assistant principals and the superintendents have always been on the side of the school board. They have never supported, I should not say never may be 1 in 100 instances where supervisory people have supported teachers. Some people may say, well if you had them in the union may be they would support may be that is so, but I doubt it. There is a functional difference that changes the attitude of people when they become supervisors. They put themselves on the other side of the table.

There are some people in the AFT who just kind of accept the situation as it is but they intimidate their principals. The union is strong enough so that the supervisory people in the system cannot exercise their control over the workers that they supervise so the conflict of interest between worker and supervisor does not appear in that kind of a situation. They keep the supervisor in his place and he does not dare to do things that are not organized under the contract. Whether the teachers actually intimidate the principals or not really presents a question in a supreme form. But, there is no question about it, the union gives the teachers heart so that they cannot be pushed around as they can in non-union situations.

In many instances, the questions of the difference of a school situation from that of a factory situation is brought up. The argument is that you are dealing with children so you have to think of their welfare first and your

own welfare second. I think that whole argument is misused by school boards and supervisory people. They try to restrict the militant action by teachers by raising the question of damage to the children. In the first place, there have been some rather lengthy strikes and so far as the effect of those strikes on test scores on standardized tests, I hate to say this but there has never been anyway to measure the effect of being out of school for a couple of months. Actually, children are undergoing a maturation process that the school has a lot of influence on but not controlling influence I would say.

This, of course, brings to mind the question of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike. For those who don't know, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike involved a demonstration district and experimental district within the school district of New York City where a special type of government involved in community control of the district was set up. The argument was that if local people control local schools the schools will be approved this also added validity. If there is validity to it or strength to that argument is that in many parts of New York City, this is true to all large cities, the district is almost entirely black while teaching staff is a majority white, not entirely so that local controlled schools it empowers blacks, and gives them more confidence.

In the Ocean Hill-Bronsville situation, the relationship between the local community and the UFT broke down because of the experimental governing board of the experimental district picked out about 19 teachers in the district and dismissed them from the district. It did not take their livelihood or salaries away from them but they sent them back to the central

board for reassignment. The union refused to go along with this and that dispute was submitted to arbitration. The arbitrator found in favor of the union, but the local board refused to recognize the decision and went out and hired replacements for people who had gone out on strike within the district. This in turn lead to an escalation of the dispute and there was a citywide strike which went on for 13 weeks.

Constantly, it was thrown up to the union the effect of that strike on the children. I would like to think that it did have a detrimental effect on the children not because I want the children to have a detrimental effect but the fact is that strikes have to have some significance. To say that a strike is just insignificant means that the strike is a futile effort on the part of the union. So, in that partucular district, I don't think the effect on children was adequately measured. According to statistics, there is almost 100 per cent turnover of children in that school anyway every year during the school year. It is a poor district. There is not much continuity of residents on the part of the people there and so the lives of children are constantly being disruptive by actions which have nothing whatsoever to do with school. It has to do with break up of homes, unemployment, disease and all the things that happen in slum areas of big cities.

I don't know what the impact of that strike was. Any strike is an unfortunate thing. I don't advocate striking just for the hell of it but when you reach a point where both sides have gone as far as they can go, and

when you have arbitration and arbitration is not accepted by one side or the other, you really don't have much left but to go on strike.

In the Ocean Hill-Brownsville case, I think that the educational effort there was just not strong enough anyway regardless of the strike. I think that there should have been a good staffing racial. There should have been more specialized personnel, remedial personnel, social workers, psychologists, counselors and there should have been city agencies saturation in the district. It was a part of the city where if anything at all could have succeeded, it would have been a miracle.

During the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike, I came into New York City a number of times and met with Al and other people from the local and also I had meetings with the superintendent of this special district, Rody McCoy. I proposed that a special arbitration board be set up two people chosen by the Union, two people chosen by the Governing Board and the fifth person be chosen by the American Arbitration Association. But, the Governing Board refused to accept this proposal so that fell through. I felt helpless in this situation, quite frankly, and I am sorry that I was not able to do more to resolve it.

The AFT was involved in the civil rights movement. We had AFT people at Selma. We had them in Mississippi for Mississippi summer. We had them in Prince George's County and Virginia when the schools were closed by the local authority rather than integrate the schools. We went down there and ran freedom schools for the blacks in the county. So, the AFT before I became

its president and after I became president has a very proud record of involvement in the civil rights movement.

One of the people in the AFT who was a leader of the civil rights struggle was Dick Parrish. Dick Parrish was a special friend of mine. I spent a lot of time with him because I liked him and I liked to be around him. He provided leadership. For a long time he integrated the Executive Board because he was the only black on the Board. Of course, I want to add very quickly that we were constantly searching out people who would consent to be on the Executive Board of the Guild and the UFT. But like Dick, all of us had our faults and he was exasperating in some ways because he was involved in so many things that he couldn't do all of them and sometimes any of them well. And, a lot of people lost patience with him, but I think the union was a better organization because of his participation.

He is dead now. He died about three or four years ago. He had been ill with an incurable disease, I have forgotten just what it was for 10 or 15 years before he died. People did not realize it at the time because he never talked about it. I knew about it because I invited him up to my house one afternoon. I lived on 124th Street on the West Side and he lived on about 136th Street on the East Side. So, occasionally we would go up in each others apartment and have a drink together. Then this stopped, and the reason was that the disease he had could not tolerate alcohol but he never told me that I didn't know it. He just politely evaded the whole question. It was not until after he died really that I was able to put everything together.

Parrish knew everybody in the Civil Rights Movement. He was well acquainted with people and he gave us good guidance on many occasions. Sometimes, we did not follow his advice and I wish that we had.

In the Ocean Hill-Brownsville situation blacks throughout New York City were on the side of the local governing board the demonstration district. This put Parrish and I in an excruciating situation because he was an officer in the union and yet he belonged to a number of other black organizations. He really was well I think, excruciating situation is about the best way to describe it. I happened to be in the UFT one day when Parrish came in. He spoke with Al when I was there and said he was going up to a meeting of black teachers and that he thought that there would probably be a move to start a Black Caucus what should he do about it? Al told him to join it, become a part of it which he did. The caucus immediately endorsed, well it did not endorse the governing boards side directly, it was a qualified endorsement. The effect of it was that the support that the side of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board in effect were acting contrary to the UFT position. I don't know what Parrish did at the meeting. Some say that he supported the motion to, but I don't know. Knowing Dick, I think he probably tried to evade taking any direct action so he could maintain his credibility with the group. At any rate, that was always held against Dick and at the time it was a sad thing.

At the time of the memorial service that was held for him, at the time of his death, no UFT representative appeared. Unions do place a good deal of demands upon the loyalty of the members and I wish that there would be a little more humanistic approach. It certainly would be possible. But, the

disputes become very bitter over the years and that is well known to anyone who has been in the union movement. Parrish guided both the AFT and the UFT through racially involved problems over a period of about 40 years. He worked with another black who was in the Guild, she was an extremely able person that is Lowell Lane. Dick was put forward by her and put on the Executive Board on her recommendation. Parrish, it is too bad that he had to die at all of course, but to die with the knowledge that the things he had tried to do just did not come to fruition is a very sad thing.

Dick was expelled from the Unity Caucus shortly after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike. He was accused of not supporting the strike. At that period, I was not close enough with him to know if he supported the strike or not. I can't believe that he did not support the strike, if the union voted to strike. He may have opposed the strike before it began but I can't believe that he would do anything to undermine the position of the Union.

Afterwards, the only incident that I know of is an incident that occurred in connection with the Black Caucus. And, in that one he really was really in a quandry whether or not to even attend the Black Caucus meeting so he came down to the UFT office and he was advised to go to the meeting. Of course, Al's side of the story is, "I did not expect for you to go up there and sell out," and we don't know what he did at the meeting to tell you the truth. And, whatever he did, I would say that it has to be weighed against 40 years of service to the union.

One problem which was a constant one for me throughout my 6 years was the growing alienation and antagonism between me and Shanker. Of course, we had been the best of friends for a long time while I was in New York City. After I became President of the AFT, that friendship weakened and finally just ended. A conflict between us was over the question of vice-presidency of the AFL-CIO.

The fundamental cause of this conflict was a difference in social policy. I steadily if anything moved leftward. I became more and more dissatisfied with the way things were going so far as social policy in the United States. I wanted the union to be more active in the liberal movement in the United States. Al, on the other hand, tied his general philosophy, belief and actions to those of the AFL-CIO which might be liberal in some quarters but, according to the way I look at it, they were really quite timid and conservative.

We differed on a number of things with the difference on social policy being at the bottom of it. I felt, for instance, originally and to the end to this day that the AFT should maintain a kind of loyal opposition position within the AFL-CIO. We should not be a part of the ruling administration originally Meany and his successor Kirkland. Instead, I felt that we should associate with the liberal unions within the AFL-CIO hoping to form perhaps at some future date a liberal caucus within the AFL-CIO. Some of those liberal unions, of course the UAW, the Communication Workers, Furniture Workers. It is a little hard to just kind of peel out the list there are not that many of them. Oh, Machinists, of course and there are others. Today there are more of them. I felt that over the years, it might be possible to

build a significant liberal presence within the AFL-CIO and that would really have a major impact on the policy of the AFL-CIO.

It grieves me, I don't know why I use that old fashioned word, I really don't grieve about it I feel very disappointed that AFL-CIO is dwindling in membership and influence. I feel if they followed a more liberal and aggressive social policy that the chances of reversing that decline would be very much improved. I think that the labor movements in all the countries, some of them may be in great difficulty but none of them are as bad off as the AFL-CIO. The policies that they pursue are considerably to the left of those at the AFL-CIO. In this way they maintained the confidence of the workers. It is clear that they represent the workers interests. So, as far as the AFL-CIO is concerned it is very difficult for the average working person to say in what way the AFL-CIO acts in his interest. As a matter of fact, many of them oppose the positions taken by the AFL-CIO in Central America, Africa and other areas of foreign policy.

The AFL-CIO allows at least openly, allows the international unions to settle a lot of questions that really ought to be the concern of the entire movement. Take what seems to be a simple question, a question of overtime. As far as I know the AFL-CIO has never taken a position against overtime. The UAW has not taken a position against overtime per say but they have taken a position against compulsory overtime and they do, from time to time, say something which points out the injustice of having some members of the union working 50 or 60 hours a week while their other members of the union are laid off - unemployed.

I think it may be an idealistic thing. But, on the other hand it is taking that kind of a position on very fundamental questions that inspires the allegiance of workers. The AFL-CIO is so conservative it is so conservative on so many questions. I will give you a funny example. Bob Hawk is now the Prime Minister of Australia but that was not always the case. At one point he was the General Secretary of the Australian Labor Movement. One day I got a phone call about 11:30 a.m. and the voice on the line said this is Bob Hawk. I knew just enough to know who Bob Hawk was. Oh well, where are you? I am in town. What are you doing here? I am on a trip around the world and I thought I was going to come to see the people in the AFL-CIO but I find now they don't want to see me. I said come on over here. And so he did and we had lunch together. And it seems as Bob Hawk put it seems the AFL-CIO did not want to talk with him because he had just come back from Moscow. The AFL-CIO thought that it was catching you know, and that he might be contaminated and so in effect put him in quarentine. They would not even meet with him.

Of course, the labor party in Australia was not empowered in those days but they hung on and kept the confidence of their workers and the Australian Labor Movement is as big now as it ever was. I think it is a little bigger. To a certain extent, the AFT has a problem in this regard. The positions taken by the NEA the competing organization are considerably more liberal on a number of questions particularly on policy than those of the AFT. The AFT by adhering so closely to the AFL-CIO line alienates a lot of teachers. Teachers by and large tend to be liberal because they teach children about the world as it should be so they, I think could be expected to approve

resolutions at conventions which would indicate their desire to reform society in the United States and perhaps around the world. It makes clear where they are and where they stand. Not all teachers are liberal by any means. It might be as much as a 40 - 60 split in favor of the liberals.

If the AFT did take more liberal positions, I think that they would inspire more followership among teachers whether they are members of the AFT or not. You know Roosevelt, I don't know what his biggest percentage of election was but I don't think it was much over 60% ever of those voting. Yet, he provided the kind of leadership that far more than 60% of the people of the United States were happy to follow. I think there is a lesson in that and the decline of AFL-CIO membership there is a lesson in that too. The AFL-CIO has come up with a lot of organizing gimmicks. A lot of benefits attached to the union card which are good enough in themselves. I am in favor of all these things, but they really do not inspire loyalty among the working people in the United States.

The AFT is also using these credit cards and other gimmicks and again I have nothing against those in a place like Texas where this method is being applied first that may be the only way you can get your foot in the door. May be after awhile, it will lead to true unionism, however, it is no substitute for real leadership of raising issues in Texas. There are plenty of educational issues in Texas that could be raised with a vigorous campaign by the union.

I don't want to be too critical on this score, but still I think the problem with the labor movement in the United States is one of leadership. But, I think mainly the source of conflict between us was just outright politics. Al wanted to advance within the union movement. I had no desire whatever to go any farther than I had. I had other interests mainly merger of the two teacher organizations. I am proud of what I was able to accomplish as President of the AFT. The membership doubled. When I left the AFT we had 457,000 members, we only have 600,000 today. Some of those are not teachers. Some of those are medical personnel.

As an organizer, I am very proud of what I was able to accomplish. A lot of that was automatic growth, of course, I didn't have anything to do with it but a lot of it was not. I think we did some pretty good things from an educational standpoint, I originated a series of conferences that are still going on. They have them annually in a number of states. I don't know whether we have another national conference but these are conferences on supposedly purely educational problems. But, organizational problems tend to creep into the meetings whenever a bunch of union people will get together.

We participated with a lot of organizations that we should be allied with while I was President. Some, you might call them do good organizations are various organizations that have their main focus on the welfare of children or the welfare of the society in general. We participated with a group of consortium really which called itself "The Children's Lobby." We got into that in a peculiar way. I wrote a column for the paper in which I advocated the formation of a children's lobby for legislative work on the Hill in Washington. Unknown to me, another group of social workers hit upon the same

phrase, "The Children's Lobby." I don't think as a result of my writing the article but they announced that they were going to form a Children's Lobby. So, I uninvited went over to the meeting and I laid claim to originating the phrase but I said that they are free to use it as far as I was concerned, only thing is I would like to have the AFT considered as a member of the organization. And, so we were.

The Children's Lobby lasted for 6 or 7 years. They did some good work on trying to get legislation for Child Care facilities, things of this kind. They weren't directly interested in the schools and education. They figured that was too complicated and too big a subject for them to get involved in. We also attended meetings of the Urban Coalition and Americans for Democratic Action. I was on the national board of ADA and other do good organizations that are scattered all over Washington.

One thing I did I think in my second year as president, I became an incognito substitute in Kansas City. I took time off from my job as president and was able to influence to get on the Substitutes list in Kansas City. I went out there and I stayed in a hotel. Every morning I would call up the Substitutes office and they would send me out to a junior high school or a high school where I would teach. I had some harrowing experiences during that week. The life of a substitute is not a happy one. Also, I was never one of those persons that had instantaneous control in the classroom. It always took a little while for me to establish my authority or leadership or whatever you want to call it in the classroom.

Substituting in some of those junior high schools was an indurance test really. The reason I became the incognito substitute because I did not want to lose contact with schools and with teachers. I felt that many people in the labor movement particularly just have lost their contact with the original workers. I think that every union official ought to be required to put in a period of time, certainly longer than a week back in the shop wherever it is. Because, I think you really have to have that touch - get off the expense account and get back among your own folks.

I think that the AFT could and should arrange to send all its organizers back into the classroom for periods for a week or a month and let them have that experience. There are some organizers on the AFT staff, I know there are some on the NEA staff too who never were teachers. Never were in a classroom except as a student. That is too bad. You have to be a part of the working class. When you are making the salary of a principal and are on an expense account and have credit cards and an automobile that is paid for all those other amalgams that go with being a staff person, it is very difficult to retain the common touch.

My experience with the staff had its ups and downs. Early on in Cogen's administration, I favored unionization of staff. I still do. I felt it was easier to deal with the staff, make more sense, have more dignity to deal with the staff as an organized group, however, I had problems anyway. We had a clause in the contract with the organizers that they were not to contribute to the campaigns of any candidates for political office within the AFT and that they were not to run for office themselves. As long as they stayed

clean that way, they had tenure. Tenure, of course, meant a grievance procedure topped by arbitration, so it was a pretty strong clause.

Some of the organizers became dissatisfied, I think it was with my advocacy of merging with the NEA. They thought that if a merger occurred, that would be the end of their position as organizers. One of the organizers Ken Meeson decided to run against me in 1970. I didn't really take this seriously at the time because I felt I had the election hands down because of the caucus system. But, I did fire Meeson because he had violated his contract and he could have gone to arbitration if he had wanted to try to get his job back. He did run for election against me and he very nearly won. If I had taken it a little more seriously, I think that the result would have been not quite so close. But, at any rate, it did not cause me to change my mind about unionization of the staff but I was just a little more cautious and alert from that time on how they were treated.

I did not get the idea of sending staff for refresher periods back into the classroom at that time, I did not get that until much later. But, I wish I had made it possible for them to go back in the classroom and perform for awhile so they would retain their touch with the working part of the union.

I got the idea of trying to bring about a merger between the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association sometime in the 1950's. I had never been an NEA hater. I had plenty of reason for it because before I came to New York I was trying to organize teachers in places where the non-union Association was all ready well established. They

were the chief opposition. In all cases they cooperated with administrators to try to keep the union out. I felt that the AFT was such a minority organization, that it lacked many things that the NEA could provide, particularly research and things of a professional nature having to do with educational policy.

On the other hand, the NEA lacked things that the AFT could provide. This is mainly because even up into the beginning of the 1960's, the NEA was controlled by administrators. The NEA building rented space to various administrator organizations like the Secondary School Principals and the American Association of School Administrators and the Elementary School Teachers Principals Association. They being in the same building with the NEA department of classroom teachers, they had a great opportunity to influence policy.

The administrators being administrators were used to thinking in terms of larger policy terms. They had left the classroom, of course, and the kind of courses they took after they had earned their AB Degrees tended to have a much broader view than the undergraduate courses. They had something to offer. The NEA had been lead in that direction. So, with AFT's militancy and NEA's resources, I thought that teachers would benefit from a merger of the two organizations. I made a premature attempt to try to get people intersted in merger.

Right at the beginning of the collective bargaining campaign in New York City, I think I could have done it. I could have merged the New York City unit then but I am glad I didn't because the AFT was not ready for this

neither were the teachers in New York. It would have dismayed everybody I think if I had proposed merging the two organizations at that time. On the other hand if the AFT could have accepted the idea, once we had a big merged organization like what became the UFT in New York and went into the NEA, we would be able to use our weight within the organization. It would be like a bowling ball going up against a row of dominos. I think that very soon we would have acquired a great deal of strength within the NEA organization and who knows may be that would have been a way to merge it.

There was a theory which I subscribed to but I have modified my views somewhat since the early 60's when I began thinking in these terms or perhaps in the 1950's. The name of the organization really did not make much difference. If you could get a unified organization or any kind of organization into a confrontation with the employer whether the teacher organization was a union at that time that confrontation began or not it soon would be as a confrontational situation rocked along. I have no fear of collective bargaining going down the drain if there was a merger. I felt that once teachers acquired power and began to confront their school boards and superintendents they would turn into unions whether they were unions in the beginning or not their organizations would.

When I say the AFT was not ready for this sort of thing, it is a very simple thing. The AFT had identified the NEA as an enemy. The NEA had done its best to snuff out the AFT since 1920. You could not erase that overnight even if you wanted to - there was a certain safety in the situation as it existed. To go into a new thing of a merged organization nobody was ready

for it at the time and I backed off myself. I did have also in the back of my mind this idea, I probably should have explained this earlier on when I was talking about the relation of the AFT to the labor movement. It explains my attitude towards the Meany administration and the labor establishment.

The labor movement in the United States was in my mind not militant enough, not confrontational enough, not dedicated to radical change in society. If the AFT became strong enough it could serve as a nucleus for a liberal grouping within the AFL-CIO.

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DAVID SELDEN INTERVIEW

January 22, 1987

Tape 5

A teachers union, if it was big enough and had proven itself in the labor confrontational situation, would gather other organizations around it if it wanted to and eventually you would have a caucus within the AFL-CIO and that is what I hoped would happen. My idea of a caucus within the AFL-CIO is not to kick George Meany out or to do anything so precipitous as to weaken the movement. I wanted to have something within the AFL-CIO that would be strong enough to alter the direction in which the AFL-CIO was going.

Along that line, I got the idea of forming a national committee for unions of professionals. It would include the Newspaper Guild, Musicians and some organizations whose membership included a lot of professionals but the union itself was not entirely professional not just restricted to professionals. Communications Workers for instance and even the Machinists might qualify because they have some engineers in membership. By forming this Council of Unions For Professionals, I think it was probably about 1966 I felt that might develop into what I had in mind some sort of a liberal caucus.

Meany smelled it out. I went ahead without asking his permission. Some of the people who came to my early meetings said, "Have you talked with

George Meany about this?" I said, "No, I don't think it is any of his business we have a right to do this." Some of them were very uneasy to go ahead without daddy's permission. Some of them wanted to become a staff department within the AFL-CIO. It has a certain attraction but really would not go in the direction that I had in the back of my mind. Finally though, I was not able to keep the Council completely separate. I was willing to take in non AFL-CIO organizations such as the NEA, the American Nurses Association and some others that might qualify as professional organizations. But, we had to compromise and we put the letters Council of AFL-CIO Unions for Professionals, that limited the organization.

We also had a meeting with Meany and Kirkland to discuss this whole situation. It was at their request. They asked us to come in and talk to them about it. Charlie and I went in and explained - by that time - I had to modify my original threatening idea to such an extent that we were able to reassure Meany and Kirland that we did not have anything political in mind. It came time for us to go, our conference with Meany and Kirkland was over and on the way out Kirkland said, "Oh, Charlie could you wait a minute?" Well, I wanted to go in with Charlie to stay there but I knew that I would not be welcome so I went on and waited for him in the ante room outside the office.

When Charlie came out he looked bemused and so after we had gotten out of the office I said, "What did they say Charlie?" He said here is what happened. Kirkland asked me if I had to become president of this new council or could somebody else be president. I said, "What did you tell them?" I told them no, I don't have to be president. Of course, Meany and Kirland did

that just for safety first. At that time, Cogen had a reputation as being a wild man within the labor movement. Half of the things on which that reputation was based had been written by me. When I became president later on, some people still had that impression about Charlie and word got back to me that people had said, "At least he is not another Cogen."

The merger idea in my mind was always tied in with the possibility of increasing teacher influence within the labor movement. I always felt that teachers would be a much better base for a liberal organization than any other group of workers. In the first place it is a big group that we are talking about nearly 3 million people. There was no other single industry that was organizable who had that many people in it. The UAW had a little over a million members at that time and I in trying to convince people of this whole thing later on when I did come out of the closet with it. I used to say look if auto workers can do it teachers can do it.

Teachers are so much more articulate than auto workers and so on. This of course tied in and gave a basic motive in wanting to merge the two national organizations. The basic reason for it was a political reason within the AFL-CIO and through that for teachers to have more influence on social policy in the United States. There was another reason, I was intentionally interested in merger in the back of my mind at any rate. Organizing was our number one problem. As long as we were bogged down in the war of organizing, trying to get teachers into the AFT, we could not devote ourselves to other things like educational policy and social policy. By

merging the two organizations, we would simply eliminate the organizing problem.

There would not be much of an organizing problem after that, although I had thought possibly we might go into the business of organizing related professions such as social workers for instance or psychologists and perhaps some other people categories don't occur to me off hand. There were probably at least 3 million other people who were closely associated with schools and teachers that it would make sense to have them in the same union. It would be quite a steamroller if you could get all of this together. As long as it retained its original purpose and was not diverted by various political exigencies that would inevitably come up. As long as it didn't become so bureaucratic that it could not do anything at all, you would really have something so that was a grand plan behind merger. Of course, the problem of that is that nobody would believe that grand plan very few people.

The way it went not everybody in the teaching profession was a socialist. Even the few that were outright socialists didn't believe that anything like this could ever be done. By this, I mean that the majority of teachers although they were good enough people they were a cut above the general runner population in their interest in social reform but they were not rabbit about it. They were mainly concerned with making a living and surviving in the schools and all things that go with being a teacher. Was there any practicality to this idea at all? Was it just a crazy dream? Well, I would say the chances of it succeeding were may be 1 in 5. If it was that much of 1 in 10 that would certainly be worthwhile to take that chance because otherwise you are doomed to continue on, in the kind of rut that

people have been in for a long time.

Why do people play the numbers? Well otherwise, they are never going to get above their economic station in life. You may say it is a waste of money, but not if you win. All you can ask is that you have a shot. The way things are now, you have to take the first things first until the teachers are all in one organization you don't have a shot. You don't have a chance of doing the sort of thing that I was talking about. It is true that both organizations now have become thoroughly bureaucratized. The next step, it seems to me is to form a caucus across the party line across the organizational line. The same caucus liberal caucus, progressive caucus although that word has been debased some name that indicates that you want the organized teachers to be a vehicle of social change. It could be a minority caucus without a merger within the two organizations or with a merger it would be a united caucus. I think there is room for it. If you have got a handful of people who see this possibility and who want to start and form something like that some day it might actually succeed.

It is not impossible. The way I feel about it is that what makes life worthwhile. If you are only in the union to get a higher salary, have fewer kids in your classroom, I don't think that is enough. You can handle that so easily. You have lots of time and energy left over to devote to society as a whole. But with a merger you have created an arena in which you can carry on the kind of enterprise that I am talking about.

When you are organizing anything you don't try to take people farther than they will go. If their primary interest is in classroom matters and

salary that is where you have to start. If you keep the other part of the dream alive and wherever you see an opportunity work it in pretty soon it will become a standard part of your program. At one time political parties in the United States served this function. There are some people who are students of the labor movement who think that the organization which existed before the AFL-CIO, thought that the Knights of Labor was a better organization a much superior form of organization to the AFL-CIO.

The AFL-CIO is a coalition of autonomous international unions. The only thing that holds them together is the fact that they need each other from time to time. Many of them don't have the same philosophy. They do cooperate on the things that they can cooperate on and they don't on the other things. It is sort of like the old League of Nations in a way. The Knights of Labor on the other hand was community based and people were not divided on organizational lines within the community. It was one lodge of the Knights of Labor for any particular area. There may be something to that it has at least some surface appeal to me. Maybe there is something I don't see here but that is the sort of thing that I would like to think of. Of course, the AFL-CIO and the AFL before the two CIO and AFL were merged made an attempt to do this their Central Labor Bodies and State Federations.

Anybody who has ever been to a Central Labor Body meeting or to even a State Labor Body meeting knows that there is very little life in these things. They don't really tackle policies. They take things that come to them. The things that come to them always have to do with some particular problem that an affiliated union is having. I went to the New York City

Central Trades and Labor Council for many years. I did it as a matter of duty and I used to sit through this thing and I remember hearing the guy representing the cooks and bartenders every meeting he would make a speech about Jack Dempsey's Restaurant. They picketed that place for years and he would get up and he would give a very impassioned speech about Jack Dempsey. How we are going to knock him out and all this and that. We tolerated it. He was entitled to have his turn. It did not interest anybody really other than the cooks and waitresses. As for the campaign to interest leaders in both the AFT and the NEA in the unity idea that proved to be very difficult. I had thought that once I had revealed this idea of unity that leaders on both sides would not be able to stand in the way that teachers would demand unity. Well, Selden was wrong again. Anyway, it had worked that way though in New York perhaps because I think the difference between the New York situation and the national situation was that teachers in New York had been driven into a situation where they had to confront the reality and they had one employer to deal with the problem was very clear. They had to find a way of dealing with that Board of Education.

When you are talking about the national level most teachers don't believe that their welfare depends on what happens in Congress or with the Presidency. They feel that primarily their welfare is decided by their local Board of Education and their Superintendent. Perhaps the legislature has something to do with it and the amount of state aid that is granted and some other things that legislatures do like providing pension benefits. But, by and large teachers are still hung up on the idea that there really are still local school districts that are all powerful.

My notion that teachers would force their leaders to move towards unity proved to be incorrect. There was not enough force. There was not enough interest or belief of teachers to get the unity movement off the ground. There was a lot of interest but it was spotty. In California for instance. Before I say this that originally when I started with the merger idea, I used to say the thought behind the merger thing is merger split. That is, teachers would be so interested in merger that if their organization stood in the way they would split away from the organization. And that actually happened in New York City. I felt what happened there and then, of course, the United Federation of Teachers which was a united organization came about. I thought that same sort of thing could be done at the national level. There was not enough interest among teachers enough realization of what could be done and enough confidence in themselves or in the idea. And, so it was very difficult to get any momentum for the merger question nationwide.

There were some people in California who got the idea and I spent quite a bit of time working with them. Talking with them and explaining the whole merger idea. Raoul Teilhet and a fellow named Hiscox, Sibelman in Los Angeles and <sup>Ballard</sup> Jim Broward in San Francisco people all around the state AFT people, anyone I could talk to I of course did.

In San Francisco Ballard was not really interested in the merger so much as he was interested in the merger idea as a ploy which would weaken and perhaps split the Association allowing the AFT to gain the upper hand as a bargaining agent in San Francisco. And usually to my help. This

was a collective bargaining campaign which the union the AFT did win. However, a year or so later the Association was able to hold another election and that one went the other way. The union lost by a narrow vote and it has attempted to return to being the bargaining agent and that has failed. They were not able to do that.

In Los Angeles a very clever organizer on the NEA side was able to take the merger idea and run with it for the NEA. They became stronger advocates of merger than the AFT people. Los Angeles is a big school district. There are about 25,000 teachers there were at that time there are about 35,000 now. Originally there were two branches of the Association and they were in opposition to each other. The difference between them was that one of them admitted administrators in their membership and the other did not. Each one of those Associations, however, had more members than the AFT local did but the AFT local was more militant and began calling for one day demonstration work stoppages.

The demonstration work stoppage was a pretty good ploy because many teachers can participate in the work stoppage without actually stopping work. They call in sick and they use a personal leave day or something of that kind and they get out there and picket without having to pay the penalty of going against the orders of the superintendent or the principal. As the AFT local in LA became more militant, the organizers in the Associations finally succeeded in merging their two Associations and then challenging the AFT local to merge with them. Finally, that created a very ticklish

situation for the AFT because we felt that if we merged with the Association at that point we would simply be swamped by Association people. So, we negotiated with them and a strategy session was held in Brooklyn. A leader from a Los Angeles AFT local came to Brooklyn and I and Al Shanker, Rose Claffey, Bob Porter and some other delegate from the AFT whose name I forget met with him and we laid out the strategy.

The strategy was this. We would go in with a proposal that the two organizations would merge and form a third organization which turned out to be the United Teachers of Los Angeles. Present members at each organization would stay in the present organization but new members joining would be able to choose one or the other - either the AFT affiliate or the NEA affiliate. In the meantime, we as the AFT group within the United Teachers of Los Angeles would propose a militant program with a strike threat in the program and openly announced we felt that this tactic or strategy was sound for us because if the Association people turned it down, our position within the United Teachers of Los Angeles would be very strong because we are the ones who wanted to do something and the Association were the people who were dragging their feet.

Well the strategy worked out very well and I would say worked out probably in the best possible way. The United Teachers of Los Angeles adopted the program that we had laid out. The Association, half of the United Teachers did not oppose the program and we presented it to the board of education who rejected the program and we called a strike. That strike took place, I believe in February, 1970. It was a well run strike. Both the NEA and the AFT sent large numbers of organizers out there to help with the strike and it resulted in a modest victory but good enough for the United Teachers of Los Angeles.

A week later however, a conservative teacher organization which had sprung up really right wing conservative who did not favor collective bargaining at all went to court and had the settlement thrown out. It took over a year of legal manipulation to get the contract legalized. The NEA became alarmed at the progress, the idea of teacher unity and of merger between the two organizations was progressing. At their convention in May of 1967, passed a resolution that no NEA affiliate could have merged with any organization that was affiliated with the AFL-CIO. And, since that time, there has been no merger. It stuck. There was not anything we could do about it. So what that meant was that there would be no piecemeal merger. There would be no local mergers, no state mergers. If there were to be any mergers at all it would have to be the whole shabang. Merger at the top and at the top nobody wanted to talk.

Well, I kept probing around the NEA and finally a fellow who became president of the NEA Don Morrison, whom I liked very much, I got to know him personally and in 1972 I proposed to him that he and I form an organization

called, "Educators for McGovern" and that we get out a letterhead and send out a mailing to the membership for both organizations for "Educators for McGovern" and we would enclose in the letter a return envelope and appeal for funds and a bumper sticker. A McGovern-Shriver bumper sticker.

It worked, it was a big gamble. In order to get that mailing out, I had to borrow money from the AFT treasury which I did on my own authority. Then the money began coming back in the envelopes we had sent out. Now since the NEA had never approved this idea Morrison, who was skating on thin ice, he never managed to get out a complete mailing to the NEA, if he had it would have made a lot of money. He sent out a mailing I am not sure, but I think to about 10,000 people. I sent the mailing to the entire AFT membership which at that time was about 275,000 people.

That whole thing cost us about \$35,000 and we got about \$40,000 back. We were able to turn over to old George McGovern something like \$5,000. But the publicity that we got off that thing was wonderful and it helped us and showed us as an activist organization. I never got any complaint whatever from any AFT member about that whole thing isn't that amazing. You would think that there would be some republicans in the organization who would want to know where I got the authority to do this and I was able to pay back the treasury.

Sometime after that election, I got a visit from a man from the Federal Treasury Department or may be it was the Labor Department. Anyway, borrowing money from your union is illegal. I professed complete ignorance to that whole thing. I said that I was not really borrowing any money for myself and legally I suppose you could say that I didn't borrow it at all "Educators for McGovern-Shriver" borrowed the money. Well he said, "We are going to let you get away with it this time but don't do it again," and I thanked him very much.

The significance of "Educators for McGovern-Shriver" is that I got much better acquainted with Don Morrison. We used to see each other from time to time. After NEA presidents finish their term of office, which at that time was one year, they become past-presidents which is an official office in the NEA and the past-president is a member of the NEA Executive Committee. A small body of about 7 or 8 people or may be it was a little more. One day I got a call from Morrison, he said the Executive Committee is meeting and I brought up the merger topic in the Executive Committee. Could I have lunch with you? I said sure.

I went over and we had lunch in the coffee shop of the Madison Hotel which has a glass front on it. I am telling this only because I don't know whether this was an omen or not but you recall this is 1972 or by this time I guess it was 1973, the weaning days of the Nixon administration. We looked out on the sidewalk people were walking by, and we saw striding along passing in view in front of us John Ehrlichman very intent on the sidewalk walking along. Well anyway, Don wanted to know how we could work out the labor affiliation thing in the NEA. I said, well there are a lot of different

things it could be done but I want to remind you that these are only suggestions on my part. I have no authority to do this and whatever is done would have to be approved by our Executive Council to begin with. But at any rate, I outlined several ways in which the merger question could be handled. One of them was that we enter into a trial affiliation with the AFL-CIO and that after three years of the trial affiliation then we would take a vote on whether to maintain the affiliation.

I rather liked that idea because I still was not entirely approving of what the AFL-CIO did and I thought that kind of arrangement would put them on notice that we were watching them and that if they didn't do things that we thought they should do, it is a possibility that this big merged teacher organization which would have two million members would pull out, would cease its affiliation. By the way, there is a record of international organizations affiliating and disaffiliating with the AFL-CIO. A number of them have done it the Machinists for instance, the Carpenters did it, the United Mine Workers did it and never came back that was before the CIO and AFL merged.

Morrison reported back to his Executive Committee and on the basis of his report passed a resolution favoring exploration of merger with the AFT and it was made public. I was aesthetic. I had more or less given up on the merger idea. I was being besieged by Shanker who was trying to take my place and trying to force me to resign and here was this proposal of merger. By the

way, I was under no illusions about becoming president of the merged organization. This matter came up in a press conference I was conducting. I said that I would not be a candidate for president of the merged organization because I did not want to think that my interest in the merger was a personal one.

I did have something in mind for myself, however. I wanted to create a staff position called, Director of Policy Formulation. This would allow me to propose things to the president of the merged organization and I thought it would be a sort of thing that I would be good at and something I would enjoy doing. At any rate, I never told anybody about this, however, because we never got that far. At any rate, I reported then what I had told Morrison and I reported also what he had told me to a meeting of the AFT Executive Committee. The Committee meeting was held in Portland, Oregon and the members of the Executive Committee were Rose Claffey, Al Shanker, Mary Ellen Riordan from Detroit and I am fishing around I am trying to remember who the others were. I think Bill Simons may have been one or else it was the president of the New Orleans local. I know I was always careful to integrate all committees so we always had at least one black on every committee I ever named.

I reported this whole thing to them in detail. No one offered any objection. I did not feel their interest in what I had done was so approving that I did not take the trouble, I should have done this because of what happened later. I should have gotten a motion through the Committee approving what I had done but I neglected to do that. So I reported however what the Executive Committee had done back to the NEA and the next move was

up to the NEA. We were ready to negotiate. Well, I had hoped that the negotiations would begin before the AFT Convention was held in August in that year, but it did not work out that way and we did not get a letter from the NEA until after the convention was over. It would have been very nice to have been able to report this to the convention and get a big vote of confidence at the convention to go into negotiations.

We already had official policy approving the merger idea and urging that we make every effort to bring about the merger with the NEA. I had also made a commitment by repeated statements that any proposal for merger would be submitted to the AFT membership. I don't know if I said AFT membership or AFT locals. It is a little technical difference there. But that it would be submitted for their proposal so that they would vote on the merger proposal whatever was worked out as a whole yes or no. It would not be amendable but it would be amendable by the Executive Council of the AFT and by that time the Executive Council had twenty vice-presidents and was a very representative body.

I want to say, parenthetically, that very few people on the Executive Council were enthusiastic or even approving of the merger idea. They had regarded the NEA so long as an enemy that they really did not want peace and used all sorts of innuendos to try to defeat the merger idea. I think that there was a great deal of suspicion among the members and among the secondary leaders of the AFT but in general, I think most people were kind of

captivated by the idea and wanted to see what was going to happen. So we moved ahead. We had all total three negotiating sessions.

The very first session, the NEA came in with a proposal which if we would have accepted it would have resulted in merger. But at the time, you can always see these things better in hindsight, we felt we had to negotiate. We felt that we had to change the proposal some way so we began proposing alternatives to things they had included in their proposal. Their proposal was very well thought out and provided for arbitration of matters that had not been agreed on, even which is extraordinary. Then we made a counterproposal but not at that meeting. We were not ready. We just told the NEA that we would have to think it over and we would send a counterproposal to them.

I drew up a counterproposal which would have advanced the negotiations but various people on the Executive Committee objected to details in my proposal. By the time I had incorporated the changes that they wanted our counterproposal made it pretty difficult for the NEA to accept. Then a strange thing happened. In the middle of these negotiations, Shanker lodged an attack on me personally. Well, he did it twice as a matter of fact. In the first place he announced that he was going to run for President a year from then. Nearly a majority of the membership was in New York state, the result of the election is a foregone conclusion. So, I became a lame duck from the time he made that announcement.

The other thing was that he picked up a chance remark that I had made in a press conference in St. Louis. A question was asked me, "Whether I thought

merger was possible?" I said, "Yes." Then the follow-up question was well, "What would you do about the AFL-CIO affiliation?" And I said, "Well that could be handled in a number of ways." I listed some of them. Some of the same things that I had told Morrison. But these were just not concrete proposals. As a matter of fact, I had printed all of them in my column in the American Teacher several times or at least twice so there is nothing new in this thing. But Shanker seized on this whole thing and claimed that I had betrayed the negotiations, given away our negotiating position and, therefore, I should resign.

I had no intention of resigning but the Executive Council had caucused on this thing before. The proposal was made and I knew it so I simply said that I would have to think it over. I waited quite a long while several weeks before I gave them an answer. I told them that I was not going to resign so we went on into the election which I lost handily. There is a neurotic aspect of this thing.

The election for President of the AFT is by locals, that is locals have a certain number of votes depending upon their size. Shanker had managed to get the AFT Constitution changed so that all voting at the convention was open, all votes are recorded. And, furthermore, this meant because of the discipline exerted by each local on his delegation the local would vote to take a position. That meant that all of those votes had to go that way so that the affect of that was to accentuate the difference in the total vote.

The ironic part is that I had tried several years before to get the AFT Constitution changed from a direct election by secret ballot by the members of the presidency, but that had been defeated chiefly by the votes of the New York local. Had a secret ballot vote for the president of the AFT still be in effect, I still would have lost but the outcome would have been quite a bit closer.

We went on into the third negotiating session. I did not attend that session. Perhaps this was the second negotiating session. I think it was the second negotiating session. I did not attend because this is following Shanker's attack on me. So, I thought to myself, I don't want to be a party to wrecking negotiations so I did not attend it and Shanker was in charge of those negotiations and they went nowhere.

We had the third session. I was back in charge again. Before those negotiations I made some proposals to the Executive Council one of which was accepted but the other two were not voted on because of objections raised by Shanker. There have been three issues involved in the merger question. One had to do with the labor affiliation. My proposal for resolving that was what I call the opt out idea that people from each organization would have a chance to within thirty days after the merger to withdraw from AFL-CIO affiliation.

A peculiar thing here, I had heard Shanker make a speech one time in which he spoke favorably for that idea but this time he did not. And we proposed it to the NEA but, by that time, the NEA knew that we had no unity on our side and there really is no sense in negotiating with us. The other

proposals I had had to do with a quota question. That question came about this way. The NEA when it was started had segregated locals and segregated state organizations in the South where it was required by customer law. In the South after a great deal of effort, they succeeded in eliminating that condition in the 1960's. As a part of the bargain on which they brought the Black American Education Association in the full membership of the NEA, they guaranteed them representation on their committees. This was denounced by Shanker as quotas. Of course, the quota idea is a real red flag word so everybody was excited about that.

My solution for that was that we turn it over to a board of arbitration of five people. I think it was one person from the Anti Defamation League, one person from the NAACP, one person from I have forgotten the other, I better not say because I am not sure but I think the Urban League was to be represented and it may have been the Jewish Labor Committee, I am not sure which one and finally the American Arbitration Association to name the fifth person. Well that proposal was never voted on because Shanker said, "Let's take one thing at a time. If they go for the question on the opt out on the AFL-CIO affiliation then we can vote for this other question." I have forgotten what the third proposal was to tell you the truth but I had an equally if you want to say ingenious solution for that.

Actually, all of these questions could have been resolved very easily if anyone had wanted to do it. The merger question was dead. I tried to revive

it several months later unsuccessfully. I went into the national convention in 1974 and was as I said previously soundly defeated, but the merger idea was still alive and it stayed alive. I kept hearing about it and now as I am saying this twelve years later, I understand that there have been some sort of informal meetings between the two organizations that perhaps these would lead to merger of the two organizations. But, of course, if they do merge we will have - I really don't want to speak about myself because I am too old to get involved in this sort of thing - a problem in trying to create the liberal program that I had in mind when I first started down the merger road.

More vital now than ever because what has happened during the six years of the Reagan administration shows very clearly that teachers need all the strength that they can muster. As long as they spend more time fighting each other than they do fighting for benefits for teachers, and improvements in schools in American society, they are not fulfilling their destiny.

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