

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

TAPED INTERVIEW

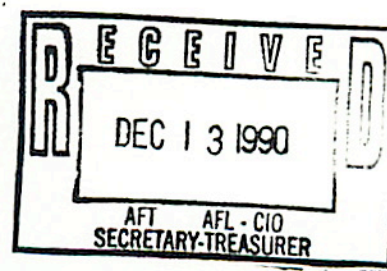
WITH

WILLIAM SIMONS

November 18 & 20, 1986
Washington, D.C.

Conducted by:
Rene Epstein

A STENOGRAPHIC RECORD
By: James P. Connor
Craig Williams
Stenographic Reporters



JOHN E. CONNOR & ASSOCIATES, INC.
1860 ONE AMERICAN SQUARE
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46282
(317) 236-6022

1 INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM SIMONS

2 TAPE I

3 MS. EPSTEIN: The following interview
4 with William Simons is taking place on November
5 18th, 1986 in Washington, D.C. This interview is
6 part of an oral history project contracted by the
7 American Federation of Teachers.

8 MR. WILLIAM SIMONS: My name is William
9 Simons. I'm a native Washingtonian, born here in
10 1924. I'm one of eight, five boys and three girls.
11 My parents were originally from Columbia, South
12 Carolina, and moved here during World War I. My
13 father was a government employee, and my mother was
14 basically a housewife, though she was the first
15 woman graduate from Allen University in Columbia,
16 South Carolina. My father was a graduate from
17 Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina.

18 Well, my father was certainly not a
19 professional in the government. He entered the
20 service as a messenger, and worked his way up in
21 the government as an electrician. However, he was
22 never given full recognition as a master
23 electrician during his government service.

1 My mother could have been a teacher and
2 probably would have been a teacher had she stayed
3 in Columbia, South Carolina, but here in
4 Washington, D.C., her interests were devoted to the
5 eight children which she bore.

6 I had no inclination towards union, I had no
7 union background whatsoever.

8 No -- well, I suppose that my father gave me
9 inspiration to fight injustices. One of the early
10 incidents in his career in the federal government,
11 he was hired as a messenger. After a few years as
12 a messenger, his supervisor called him in one day
13 and said that he was going to be promoted to a
14 clerk. However, he would not be given a clerk's
15 salary, he would still be doing the same duties
16 that he had been doing all along. He politely said
17 "No, thank you. If I can't get paid for a
18 different title, I'll stay where I am."

19 Another incident that he related to us was
20 the fact that he was able to do a number of things
21 with his hands. He was an expert carpenter, for
22 example, and he used to take the scrap lumber and
23 make furniture for his girls. One day while

1 working on his lunch period, his supervisor said,
2 "Fine, when you finish that, I would like for you
3 to make a companion piece so that both would be
4 ready for Christmas."

5 And my father said to him, "Over my dead
6 body. If you want me to make some furniture for
7 your daughters, I'll be happy to do so at the going
8 rate. This is for my daughter, and that's where it
9 is going."

10 My father was very active in the community,
11 and he belonged to a number of organizations. And
12 I suppose that's where I got the inclination to
13 join organizations. But also, he told me that if
14 you are going to join an organization, if it's
15 worth joining, it's worth working in. So, I never
16 joined any organization unless I intended to become
17 an active member of that organization.

18 I went to school here in the District of
19 Columbia, John F. Cook School, Shore Junior High
20 School, Dunbar Senior High School and then to the
21 Teachers College. Why I went to the Teachers
22 College is very simple, there was no money to go
23 anywhere else, and in those days there were very

1 few employment opportunities for blacks other than
2 teachers, ministers, dentists perhaps, a few, and
3 that was about the size of it.

4 Well, unions in the early days were
5 discriminatory just as society as a whole was
6 discriminatory. And certainly the craft unions
7 were not eager to take in black members. Now, I
8 don't know whether there was any union here
9 available for my father to join, certainly I don't
10 believe that the American Federation of Government
11 Employees was in operation during the days that he
12 was an employee.

13 So, I don't know, there was never any
14 discussion about unions in the home, and I really
15 don't know whether he was offered or ever tried to
16 join a union. But I do know that blacks were
17 excluded from membership in many instances in many
18 unions. Or if they did join unions, they were
19 segregated into separate locals.

20 To the best of my knowledge, my father was a
21 Republican. I don't know whether or not he
22 maintained a voting residence in South Carolina.
23 As you know, during those days there was no voting

1 whatsoever in the District of Columbia, not even
2 for dog catcher. So that politics really did not
3 play an important role in the city, and very little
4 of it was discussed at home, except, of course,
5 during presidential election years. Even though we
6 couldn't vote, we did follow the presidential
7 elections.

8 Well, my education began at the John F. Cook
9 Elementary School, and I suppose that I, well, had
10 a unique experience in a sense. I started in the
11 first grade when I was five years old. I skipped
12 two grades in elementary school so that I graduated
13 from Dunbar High School when I was 16 years old.
14 Schools, of course, at that time were segregated,
15 and that was the way of life and we simply accepted
16 it.

17 Talk about busing, in order for most of the --
18 or many of the children in D.C. to get to school,
19 they had to ride the bus because there were no
20 schools near them. There were only three high
21 schools for blacks, and they were concentrated in
22 the northwest section of the city. So that the
23 children that lived in northeast, southeast and

1 southwest had to catch the bus, or streetcar in
2 those days, in order to come to the high schools.

3 Well, of course, black history was played
4 down in those days. There was very little in
5 textbooks. We used to have to get supplemental
6 materials. That's why Carter G. Woodson was so
7 important, because it was he who began to write
8 books about blacks that were used in the schools in
9 the District of Columbia.

10 Yes, we had heroes. There was, of course,
11 Joe Lewis. There were, of course, the black
12 baseball players such as Sachel Page and Josh
13 Gibson, Buck Leonard and many others. Used to have
14 a team here, the Homestead Grays that used to play
15 in the old Whiffet (sp?) Stadium, 7th and Florida
16 Avenues, Northwest. I used to go there on Sunday
17 afternoons and see the double headers when the
18 Washington Senators were not in town.

19 I really had no idea of what I wanted to do.
20 I was doing very well in senior high school even
21 though I suffered because I was younger than my
22 classmates, and they looked upon me as a baby. As
23 a matter of fact, my senior year in the exchange of

1 Christmas gifts, I received a teething ring and a
2 rattle. When I would ask the young ladies to go to
3 the movie with me, "No, I don't go out with
4 babies."

5 Yet, when I finally found someone that would
6 go to the movies with me, she was a tenth grader,
7 and I, of course, was a senior in the 12th grade,
8 then they used to kid me about robbing the cradle.

9 So, my life was pretty miserable, in a sense.
10 As a matter of fact, my ambition was to graduate
11 from high school. All of us had to graduate from
12 high school because my mother insisted upon it.
13 She said that if she had to come to our graduation
14 in a wheelchair with a seeing eye dog, she would be
15 there to see that each one of us graduated, and we
16 all did. Well, my idea of the world was to
17 graduate from high school and get a messenger's job
18 in the government at \$98 a month. However, most of
19 my classmates went up to the Teachers College, it
20 was Minor Teachers College at that time, to take
21 the entrance exam, and they said "Come on, Bill,
22 let's go anyway. You might like it."

23 So, I took the exam, and of course I passed

1 that and I was admitted to Minor Teachers College.
2 As I said previously, there was no money in the
3 family for me to go elsewhere. I had no knowledge
4 about scholarships or what have you. So, Minor at
5 twelve dollars a year was the place that most of us
6 went to. And you could even pay that on
7 installments.

8 Well, finished up two years, and then, of
9 course, World War II was under way. They told us
10 in 1941, right after the war had broken out, if we
11 signed up for the reserves, we would be guaranteed
12 to complete our college education before we went
13 into service. But that turned out to be a joke.
14 And in February of '43 I was inducted into the
15 armed services. Took my basic training at Camp Lee
16 in Petersburg, Virginia, then was shifted over to
17 Camp Picket in Blackstone, Virginia. I finished my
18 basic training in May and at the end of June I was
19 on the Queen Mary headed for England.

20 I spent the next two years, '43 to --
21 February of '43 to November '45 in the service. I
22 was in a quartermaster outfit. I ended up being
23 the master sergeant of the battalion on the channel

1 on D day and landed in France on June 7th, 1944.
2 It was a very harrowing experience, something that
3 I couldn't buy for millions of dollars, but
4 something that I would not want anyone else to go
5 through. War is hell.

6 I came back in November of '45. My sister
7 was doing her M.A. at the University of Chicago,
8 and she asked me to come out for the month of
9 December, because I couldn't come back into Minor
10 until February of '46. I stayed out there December
11 and January and then came back to D.C., reentered
12 Minor and finished in '47.

13 I was appointed as a teacher in September of
14 1947 at the Bannica (sp?) Junior High School. At
15 that time there was a union here in the District of
16 Columbia of teachers. However, I had no knowledge
17 of the union, but I did decide to join it in 1948.

18 All right. Growing up in a segregated city,
19 a segregated country, my experiences during the war
20 were also segregated. I can recall one instance
21 when we were in the same vicinity with white troops
22 and we shared the common bath facilities. I was
23 asked on several occasions, "Why do you comb your

1 hair? Does it look any different when you comb it
2 or when you leave it uncombed?"

3 So, coming back, even though the war was
4 supposed to be freedom for democracy and all the
5 other slogans, it was business as usual here in
6 Washington, D.C. and everywhere else. And I can
7 recall talking to several people, one person in
8 particular, Julius Hobson, said that when he went
9 back to Alabama in his uniform, he was stopped and
10 they made him take off his uniform even though he
11 had a very distinguished career as a soldier.

12 When I joined the union, I really did not
13 know anything about the unions, but the building
14 rep came around and simply asked me, how about
15 joining the union? I said fine. Conditions in the
16 D.C. schools were horrible in the sense that
17 classes were large. It was not uncommon to have
18 classes of 45, 50, even as high as 60 at times. Of
19 course, the textbooks were scarce, few and far
20 between. Supplies were almost non-existent. There
21 were any number of things, but I didn't join the
22 union necessarily to -- oh, I did not have in mind
23 when I joined the union that the union was going to

1 be able to do anything about those problems. I
2 might say, also, that I joined the NEA around the
3 same time. In fact, at one time I paid up my life
4 membership in the NEA, but I soon found out that
5 that was not for me either.

6 It was really a revelation when schools were
7 desegregated here in the District of Columbia to
8 really find out just what was on the other side of
9 the fence. I remember before desegregation, a
10 member of the Board of Education, Dr. Margaret
11 Jusbucher (sp?) suggested that the two technical
12 high schools -- there was the white technical high
13 school, McKinley Tech, and there was the black,
14 Armstrong Technical High School -- and she said
15 since they are supposed to be equal, she moved that
16 the population switch, that the whites go to
17 Armstrong and the blacks go to McKinley. Of
18 course, she was laughed out of the city, but she
19 was serious in her effort to point out that the
20 schools were not separate and equal.

21 Well, at that time there were three locals --
22 no, there were two locals in the District of
23 Columbia, Local 27 was the black teachers local,

1 Local 8 was the white teachers local. Sometime
2 during the fifties, and I don't recall the exact
3 date, oddly enough there was formed an integrated
4 local of attendance officers. That was Local 858.
5 So that there were three locals here in the city.

6 The local tried to address the problems in
7 the black schools. Well, one major problem was the
8 fact that the lunch -- there were no lunch periods
9 really. If you got a lunch period you considered
10 yourself lucky. Problems of supplies, equipment,
11 textbooks, they were addressed by the local as well
12 as the overcrowded classes. The local, of course,
13 testified before the Board of Education, also
14 testified before Congress, because during those
15 days Congress, as it still does now, controls the
16 budget, but it controlled it even more so then.
17 All salary matters had to be taken up by Congress
18 and bills had to be enacted and signed by the
19 president before teachers got any kind of a salary
20 increase.

21 The local did work on problems, I must admit
22 that I was not very active in the local at the
23 time, and I will relate this. There was a drive on

1 at Bannica to try to get regular, regularly
2 scheduled lunch periods. And there was a petition
3 that was presented to the principal or -- no, what
4 happened was this. The petition was signed, it was
5 not presented to the principal, but a letter with
6 the signatures was sent to the then president of
7 the local. He in turn contacted the principal
8 about the matter, and the principal called in each
9 of the faculty members one by one and asked them^s
10 did they sign a letter complaining about the lunch
11 periods. I was called in and I swore that I knew
12 nothing about the matter at the time. That was my
13 first and last time doing that, but I did do that.

14 Well, I guess I had reservations. I guess I
15 was afraid to admit that I would sign something
16 like that at that time. I have no knowledge of
17 really what a union could do or what the
18 capabilities of the labor movement were. I simply
19 joined because I was asked to join. I had no real
20 commitment to it. Neither did I have any real
21 commitment to the NEA at the time that I joined. I
22 just thought it was proper to join an organization.
23 And even though I knew that eventually I was going

1 to become active, at that particular time I was not
2 active and I just felt that there was nothing that
3 could be done. The principal was the lord and
4 master of the individual school. And certainly you
5 couldn't go down and see the superintendent, at
6 least I didn't know that you could go down and see
7 the superintendent or anybody else to talk about
8 the problems. And it just seemed as though it was
9 just a hopeless case.

10 Nevertheless, I guess I felt within me that
11 something had to be done sometime and that it could
12 be done best through an organization rather than
13 individually.

14 To me, I never thought about whether or not
15 it was professional or unprofessional to belong to
16 a union. I simply joined an organization not
17 knowing what really it was, and that was that. No,
18 for me, there was no question about the blue
19 collars being below me, because after all, my
20 father was a blue collar worker and certainly I had
21 the greatest respect for him. And people that
22 worked with their hands I knew were very good
23 people. I was just sorry that I never developed

1 any real skills with my hands.

2 Prior to 1953 there were the three locals
3 here in the District of Columbia, Local 27, the
4 black local, Local 8, the white local, and oddly
5 enough, the integrated local of attendance
6 officers. AFT started in 1951 to exert its
7 influence to bring about the integration of the
8 three locals. There were joint meetings of the
9 executive committees of the locals during those
10 years. I was not an active member except that I
11 did go to meetings, but I was not an officer. I
12 was a building representative and I really did not
13 know too much about what was going on.

14 But at any rate, in May of 1953, the merger
15 was completed and a new charter was given to the
16 Washington union. It became Local 6 of the
17 American Federation of Teachers. The local at the
18 time of merger had about nine hundred members, but
19 the membership dropped because there were those
20 who, of course, still did not believe in
21 integration and they dropped out and many of the
22 blacks also dropped out, because the blacks really
23 felt that the local was going to be taken over by

1 the whites. Many of them felt that way, and they
2 felt that they weren't going to get a fair shake.

3 Oh, let me go back and add this. That the
4 attendance officers were really a major holdout in
5 bringing about the merger of the three locals,
6 simply because they felt that the teachers would be
7 the dominant force in the local and would not look
8 after their special interests. However, that
9 proved to be false as things went on.

10 Well, the local still pursued the avenue of
11 testimony before the Board of Education, testimony
12 before Congress in trying to resolve the various
13 problems of the school system.

14 Integration as far as my teaching career is
15 concerned really made no difference. I stayed at
16 Bannica Junior High School. As a matter of fact, I
17 stayed there my whole 18 years that I was a teacher
18 in the system. I suppose the only major difference
19 was that our classes did become somewhat smaller in
20 that the other schools in the area began to take up
21 students and we did get a few white students.
22 However, one of the things that happened after
23 integration was the introduction of the track

1 system into the D.C. public schools.

2 Now, it is said by many that the purpose of
3 the track system was to resegregate the schools
4 within an integrated situation, because we found
5 that in a majority of the instances the blacks were
6 relegated to the lower tracks and the whites were
7 in the upper tracks. We also found that over the
8 years that the students that had started out in
9 what was then called the junior primary which was
10 somewhere between kindergarten and first grade,
11 usually ended up in the basic track.

12 Prior to integration, even though the
13 conditions were horrible, teachers made a
14 conscientious effort to see to it that the students
15 were up to par with any students no matter where
16 they might find them. Not just because since we
17 had limited employment opportunities, you might say
18 that the best of the blacks went into the teaching
19 profession. And this showed up in the progress of
20 the students throughout the city. The track
21 system, of course, as I said, was instituted after
22 integration. It was supposed to be based on the
23 fact that you put like students together, you work

1 with them, but then as a student progressed, the
2 student was supposed to be able to move up to the
3 next level. That did not happen.

4 I can recall one year the principal came to
5 me at the beginning of the school year and asked if
6 I would take a basic class. This was a class of
7 nine girls. I said yes, because I felt that I
8 could work with them as long as the number stayed
9 small, and to be able to do something with them.
10 Basic track is the lowest track. I guess today we
11 would call those students who are now in special
12 education, were in the basic track.

13 For a semester, from September through
14 February we had fun. The girls really needed help,
15 but I was able to give it to them because there
16 were only nine and we were able to do a number of
17 things. And then as luck would have it, lack of
18 funds for sufficient teachers, in February they put
19 in 18 boys with those nine girls, and bink, there
20 went my program. And from February to June it was
21 just a matter of keeping order and just daily
22 routine, not too much learning took place.

23 In the still predominantly black schools,

1 because we did not have busing here in the District
2 of Columbia to integrate the schools -- they did
3 have boundaries, and well, by that time, of course,
4 the housing patterns had changed and there were
5 many blacks moving into different parts of the
6 city, just as I moved out here where I am located
7 now, and the junior high school right across South
8 Dakota Avenue, of course, was a white school, but
9 my daughter went to that school. So, there was no
10 busing as such.

11 Now after the Scally-Wright (sp?) decision,
12 you did have a shift of teachers in an effort to
13 try to integrate the teaching population. But that
14 was very difficult to do because, well, by that
15 time the student population was about 95 percent
16 black. The teaching population was about 80
17 percent black. So, very little integration that
18 you could do.

19 All right. As I said, there was no busing
20 here for students in order to try to achieve
21 integration. That would have been impossible as
22 the student population was 95 percent black. The
23 teaching population was about 80 percent black.

1 Many of the white teachers who were here before
2 integration went to Maryland and Virginia and to
3 other parts. However, the track plan made it
4 possible for those schools that still had a good
5 percentage of white students, schools west of Rock
6 Creek Park, to maintain segregation in those
7 schools through the tracking method. Most of the
8 black students were put in the basic or the general
9 track and the white students were in the college
10 preparatory or the honors track.

11 Well, now, what you have to remember is this,
12 that when the schools were segregated, of course
13 the blacks work with blacks and that was that. The
14 black teachers did everything they possibly could
15 to make sure that the children were properly
16 prepared. But now you've got a different
17 situation. With integration there were many whites
18 who felt that the blacks could not learn, still the
19 squeamishness, what have you, did not want to be
20 bothered with them, and in an effort to make sure
21 that they would not contaminate the white students,
22 they were segregated within the schools.

23 Yes, it was supposedly done on testing, but

1 then there was quite a bit of arbitrary and
2 capricious placement of students. Now, this was
3 not only in what were the formerly all white
4 schools, but we also found many shoddy practices in
5 black schools. For example, we found that -- when
6 I say "we", I'm talking about the union, because
7 the union did become involved in investigating the
8 track system and fought to abolish the track
9 system.

10 Now, at Bannica we had the track system, and
11 as I had indicated, I became involved with the
12 basic track with this group of nine girls I only
13 enjoyed working with for a semester, and at the end
14 of that semester, 18 boys were thrown in with the
15 nine girls and my program was shot to hell.

16 Now, also, one of the things that caused me
17 to become concerned about the track system was the
18 fact that what used to happen when new students
19 transferred into the school, they simply looked for
20 the smallest section of that grade level and put
21 the student there. I had a student that was
22 transferred in during the eighth grade and the
23 first day I knew that she did not belong in a basic

1 class. I tried that whole semester -- this is in
2 September when she came to me -- I tried the whole
3 semester from September to February talking to the
4 principal, to the counselor, assistant principal,
5 everyone, trying to get the young lady moved out of
6 that class because it was stifling her and I could
7 not take the time to give her the work that she
8 needed.

9 Finally in February I went to the teacher
10 next door who had the same level eighth grade
11 section and asked her to let this young lady follow
12 her section program. I taught her section, so
13 that's one class we didn't have to worry about. I
14 went to all of the other teachers and asked them to
15 take her in. The girl ended up winning the
16 Shakespeare Festival contest that year. But she
17 was put in the basic track, and finally let her go
18 on with that class in the ninth grade. And I think
19 she's teaching today.

20 The supervisors at Bannica were all black and
21 it was just that they did not want to make change.
22 They like anything else, people reluctant to make
23 changes that needed to be made.

1 Another example was the fact that there was a
2 girl who made the school honor society, but because
3 she got into some difficulty, a minor scrape with
4 one of the teachers, they would not let her go into
5 the honors track in the ninth grade. You had to
6 enter the honors track in the ninth grade in order
7 to continue through high school. She made all A's
8 in high school but she did not graduate as an honor
9 student because she did not start out in the honors
10 track in the ninth grade.

11 The basic children were segregated in the
12 cafeteria. They were prevented from attending
13 various assembly programs. They got very few
14 opportunities to take school-related trips. And it
15 was that that led me to believe that the track
16 system was wrong, and it was not in the best
17 interest of the students. That's why I became
18 active in the union to try to get rid of the track
19 system.

20 The union was integrated in 1953, received
21 charter number 6 from the American Federation of
22 Teachers. At that time I was a building
23 representative at Bannica Junior High School.

1 Building representative is the union rep in the
2 building, comparable to a shop steward. But we
3 call them building representatives.

4 The first president of the local was a
5 counselor at what was then Western Senior High
6 School. Membership dropped for various reasons.
7 Whites got out because they didn't believe in
8 integration. Blacks dropped out because they had
9 felt that the union could not do anything and you
10 were going to have white leadership, and that would
11 not be interested in the interest of the black
12 teachers.

13 The membership fluctuated, I would say,
14 between 600 on down to 250 and up again, up and
15 down during those early years. The second
16 president of the local was a black, Paul Cook. He
17 at that time was an assistant professor at the
18 Teachers College. He was very active in bringing
19 about, bringing attention to the numerous problems
20 that existed in the school system, and there were
21 many problems. As I indicated, the classes were
22 large, the supplies were still negligible, and also
23 the fact that no duty free lunch periods,

1 especially on the elementary level.

2 He remained president for two years and then
3 we had Carol McCameron (sp?) who was a high school
4 mathematics teacher. She was white. She remained
5 president for four years, and then Paul Cook became
6 president again. He is my immediate, or was my
7 immediate predecessor.

8 Now, during the time I did begin to become
9 active in the union. In 1956 I attended a union
10 workshop at Pennsylvania State University during
11 that summer. I was parliamentarian of the local.
12 I then became corresponding secretary for the
13 local. In 1964 I was elected for the first time as
14 president of the local.

15 I realized that a strong organized body could
16 bring about some changes, not only in ensuring that
17 the students were going to get a fair shake, but
18 also that teachers would get a fair shake.

19 We had no collective bargaining at that time,
20 but I thought that we could achieve collective
21 bargaining if we simply kept at it. Some of the
22 issues that we took up, the track system which we
23 fought and finally abolished with the Scally-Wright

1 decision, also meetings of the Board of Education.
2 The Board of Education used to meet at two o'clock
3 in the afternoon which meant that teachers could
4 not attend the meeting, nor could the working
5 public. We were able to get the Board of Education
6 to shift its meetings to night. And that was done
7 with the help of the Central Labor Council as well
8 as the Congress, parents and teachers.

9 Prior to my becoming president of the union,
10 there was very little activity. Many of the
11 teachers were afraid to join the union because the
12 principals did not like unions. As a matter of
13 fact, in a few schools the principals used to pay
14 the fees for the NEA, DCEA and the teachers would
15 have to pay back during the course of the year.
16 The principals were anti-union. They intimidated
17 teachers. We had principals who made comments to
18 the effect that "I know of two organizations here
19 in the city, the Teachers Union and the District of
20 Columbia Education Association, to my knowledge
21 there has never been a teacher in my school who has
22 been a member of the union." And there was not
23 much activity going on.

1 There was a relationship with the Central
2 Labor Council, there were delegates from the local
3 to the Central Labor Council, but even so, the
4 Central Labor Council was not too much involved or
5 too much interested in the union activities. And I
6 think the reason was that the union was really not
7 doing anything. There was no definite organizing
8 strategies. The building representative used to go
9 around to teachers trying to collect the dues which
10 in those days was six dollars a year, but even so,
11 could get very few takers. And if you got taker
12 there was very little activity going on. There was
13 no collective bargaining at all during those days.
14 There was no grievance procedure. So, you were
15 really at the mercy of the bureaucracy of the
16 school system.

17 The major activity of the union prior to my
18 becoming president was to make presentations before
19 the Board of Education. There was a legislative
20 representative who followed measures on the Hill
21 relating to the D.C. public schools. It's very
22 difficult to measure the terms of success or
23 failure of the legislative activities. Really I

1 don't know, I suspect that there were some
2 successes in getting some of the bills passed. But
3 very little is really known about that.

4 As far as the school system is concerned, you
5 had a polite reception at the Board of Education, a
6 polite reception from the superintendent, but that
7 was just about it. At that time the District of
8 Columbia Education Association, affiliate of the
9 NEA, claimed to be the representative of the
10 teachers. I suspect they did have some measure of
11 influence on the Hill because many of their
12 representatives, the legislative representatives is
13 what I am trying to say, lived in Virginia and was
14 very close to then Congressman Joe Broyhill (sp?)
15 and other members of Congress. But it was just
16 simply a lobbying organization without any
17 effective way to lobby.

18 I learned about the AFT by going to
19 conventions. My first convention was in 1957 in
20 Chicago. Then I have been to every convention
21 through this year, 1986. Will probably be my last
22 one, but nevertheless, I was there.

23 Well, actually, as far as the union's

1 participation in the various caucuses of the AFT,
2 some of the older members, Selma Borschot (sp?),
3 for example, I suspect was a member of the
4 progressive caucus. There really wasn't too much
5 attention given to caucuses by the local as such.
6 I used to experiment with all of them before I
7 finally joined the progressive caucus. So that
8 really didn't play a role in local affairs.

9 Now, I don't know why, I just guessed that we
10 went to conventions and we became involved in
11 activities at the convention, and at the end of the
12 convention, that was it. I didn't think about it
13 any more until next year. And then next year we
14 started all over again.

15 What you have to remember is that since there
16 were no local politics at all, the political factor
17 was not very important in this union at all. There
18 were no divisive factors, there were no factions at
19 all within the union. They were just individuals
20 who agreed on certain items and who disagreed on
21 certain things. So, we don't have that political
22 action within the locals. As a matter of fact, I
23 can recall the days when the union refused to make

1 recommendations to the judges of the district court
2 of the District of Columbia about board members.
3 Now, board members used to be appointed by the
4 judges of the U.S. District Court, and the judges
5 would ask groups to send in recommendations. And
6 this union refused to do so on the grounds that you
7 might alienate someone. So that there was no
8 political action at all, no political factions.

9 Lacking a political climate here in the city,
10 many people sort of reticent about trying to do
11 things, we had no one really to whom we could go to
12 address problems. The city government was
13 appointed by Congress. We had then three
14 commissioners who really had no power whatsoever
15 except for ceremonial functions. All of the laws
16 were passed by Congress. We didn't even have a
17 non-voting delegate in Congress as we do today.

18 There were people who did keep their voting
19 registration in their home states, but they were
20 few and far between. They never really got
21 together to make a concerted effort to go see
22 someone from New York or someone from South
23 Carolina or wherever, a group of them might have

1 come from originally.

2 So, I think that the lack of political action
3 really hampered the development of the union, and I
4 suspect that coming out of a segregated mold
5 knowing that the blacks in the city really had no
6 power. As a matter of fact, I can recall the black
7 superintendent while he was an assistant
8 superintendent, head of the public schools, used to
9 boast about how much money he had saved Congress by
10 turning back a portion of the school budget
11 allocated to the black schools to Congress each
12 year. So, that sort of thing, there really wasn't
13 anything to really grab ahold to.

14 Now, the District of Columbia Education
15 Association which claimed that it represented over
16 two-thirds of the teachers in the city really were
17 tools, the organization with tools of the
18 principals, and it really never challenged
19 anything.

20 So, there wasn't really anything doing. Now,
21 in 1962, Carl Magel was president of the AFT, and
22 Carl was invited as our luncheon speaker for the
23 annual building representatives meeting. And at

1 that meeting Carl said that he believed that
2 Washington was ripe for collective bargaining and
3 for the growth of a union, and that he would do
4 what he could in order to help this along.

5 Paul Cook who was then the president of the
6 local told Carl that he believed that the teachers
7 union could win a collective bargaining election if
8 we could ever get one from the Board of Education.
9 Of course, at that time Washington, D.C. was
10 considered an appendage of the federal government,
11 and we were under the same kind of regulations that
12 the federal employees were under. No collective
13 bargaining for the federal employees at that time,
14 hence no collective bargaining for teachers at that
15 time. Nevertheless, Paul Cook was convinced that a
16 job could be done.

17 Now, prior to that my only knowledge of help
18 from the American Federation of Teachers was the
19 time prior to 1953 when Carl Magel was instrumental
20 in integrating the three locals into one union.
21 Other than that, I have no knowledge of anything
22 that the American Federation of Teachers did for
23 the teachers here in the District of Columbia.

1 However, we did have a vice president on the
2 Executive Council of the American Federation of
3 Teachers, Selma Borschot who also served as the
4 Washington representative for the American
5 Federation of Teachers during those years. So that
6 there was contact with the American Federation of
7 Teachers, but of course I was not active on the
8 scene at the time.

9 No, after I became president, I felt that the
10 union should take a more active role in addressing
11 issues not only in education with the Board of
12 Education, but taking stands on issues in the
13 community at large.

14 In 1964 at the convention in Chicago, the
15 American Federation of Teachers said to me that
16 they would give me a full-time organizer if we
17 could put together a program of organization
18 leading toward collective bargaining. The AFT was
19 able to get a full-time organizer from the
20 Industrial Union Department. Mel Stack came to
21 work with the local in September of 1964, and he
22 was out beating the bushes getting members. We had
23 become active on a number of issues. The AFT did

1 send in additional assistance in the form, in the
2 persons of Joe Casella (sp?) and George Brickhouse
3 (sp?). Joe Casella shocked the city by saying that
4 the Board of Education in Washington, D.C. was
5 supporting segregation in that the principals in
6 many schools were forcing teachers to become
7 members of the NEA.

8 The NEA was still segregated at the time, and
9 therefore, drawing the inference that the Board of
10 Education was responsible for supporting
11 segregation. That made headlines in the black
12 press, the Washington Afro here, and that really
13 started things moving. We were then able to begin
14 to get into buildings. We confronted the
15 superintendent about having meetings in the school
16 buildings during the lunch period and after school
17 or before school at times we would not be
18 obstructing the instructional program.

19 The superintendent was reluctant, but he
20 finally agreed, and that's when we started visiting
21 all of the schools in the city. Now, in November
22 of '65, that was when John F. Kennedy issued the
23 executive order 10966 which provided for collective

1 bargaining, albeit limited collective bargaining
2 for federal employees. That was made applicable to
3 the District of Columbia employees with the
4 exception of the teachers, the fire fighters and
5 the police.

6 I petitioned the Board of Education to adopt
7 the executive order.

8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
TAPPE II

MS. EPSTEIN: This is Rene Epstein. My interview with William Simons is continuing on November 18th, 1986 in Washington, D.C.

MR. WILLIAM SIMONS: Thank goodness, the Board of Education did not adopt the executive order, for the scope of bargaining under the executive order is very limited. There were very few things that the federal employees unions could bargain over at that time. Times have changed and things have gotten better. But we would have been very limited in the scope of bargaining with the Board of Education. Plus the fact, the Board of Education had no power to establish salaries for teachers. That was still done by Congress. So, we could not do anything about that at any rate.

We understood the situation. And as I've told people time and time again, this is the only situation like this in the 50 states of the United States. We realize that we could bargain with the Board of Education on working conditions. However, we still would have to go to Congress in order to get salary increases.

1 Now, under the executive order, anything that
2 pertained to policy whatsoever, was outside of the
3 scope of bargaining. So, it meant that there was
4 very little that the early federal unions could
5 really bargain about. But nevertheless, the idea
6 that they could bargain collectively was very
7 important.

8 Now, Mel Stack and I worked very well
9 together. He took care of business during the day.
10 I was still teaching that year, '64-'65. I spent
11 every spare moment I could out of a classroom on
12 the telephone talking with Mel getting things
13 straight, and as soon as school was over I would go
14 down to the union office and spend the rest of the
15 night trying to take care of other matters that had
16 to be taken care of during the -- or taking care of
17 union business.

18 We were fortunate in that the Industrial
19 Union Department sort of adopted us, gave us our
20 first office space in the TWA Building on the
21 corner of 17th and K Streets Northwest. It's no
22 longer there now. We stayed there and then they
23 brought us over to the AFL-CIO Building and gave us

1 space in the Industrial Union office. So, it made
2 it convenient. We had a place to work with all of
3 the facilities and equipment necessary in order to
4 get the job done.

5 Jack Conway was the then executive director
6 of the Industrial Union Department. Jack simply
7 told me that he would furnish whatever I needed and
8 for me to go ahead and get the job done. Nick
9 Zonerich (sp?) was his assistant, and I worked very
10 closely with Nick. As a matter of fact, Nick had a
11 daughter who still teaches in the D.C. public
12 schools, and she became a building representative
13 and helped to organize her building west of Park.

14 They never bothered me in any way, shape or
15 form, and never asked me about how things were
16 going or what have you, and they would pass
17 pleasantries, but never tried to get into our
18 business of how we were organizing. And I was so
19 grateful on the night of April 25th, 1967 when we
20 were declared the bargaining agent for the
21 teachers, that I could go to Jack and Nick and say
22 thank you, thank you, thank you, because it was a
23 wonderful feeling.

1 The Industrial Union Department was very much
2 interested in organizing the unorganized, and they
3 looked upon the teachers as a group of unorganized
4 people in general that could make a contribution to
5 the labor movement. I can recall my last NEA
6 convention in Denver, Colorado, in 1962. The then
7 president of the IUE -- oh, what is his name? At
8 any rate, I'll think of it -- was invited to speak
9 to the convention. And he began to tell them about
10 the New York story about what could happen when
11 teachers organized and began to bargain
12 collectively. He was hooted off the stage. And I
13 guess it was that incident that made me realize
14 that NEA might not be the organization for me.

15 It was that and another incident that made me
16 that was my last dealings with the NEA. I revoked
17 my life membership after the 1962 convention. I
18 guess the other thing along that line was the fact
19 that it wasn't until 1961 that the National
20 Education Association recognized that the Supreme
21 Court had spoken in 1954 about the integration of
22 schools. In the 1960 convention in Los Angeles,
23 working with a group of enlightened folks in the

1 NEA, we were able to put the motion on the floor
2 getting the NEA to recognize the Supreme Court
3 decision. However, we were not skilled in
4 parliamentary procedures, and even though the
5 motion passed, it was recalled and voted down.
6 However, over that winter we kept in contact, and
7 in 1961 at Atlantic City, I put the motion on the
8 floor, we had all of our bases covered and the
9 motion finally passed.

10 In 1962 in Denver, I came with the idea of
11 putting some additional resolutions with respect to
12 integration on the floor of the NEA convention, but
13 was told, "You're going too fast. You've got all
14 that you're going to get out of this organization
15 at this time." So, I guess that and the way that
16 Jim Carey, that's his name, president of the IUE,
17 was treated at the convention made me give up any
18 hopes for the NEA. That's when I began to turn my
19 full attention to the American Federation of
20 Teachers.

21 Now, Mel Stack was the only organizer for
22 most of the year. The next year Joe Casella and
23 George Brickhouse was sent in from the AFT. We got

1 along very well together, because I established
2 right from the beginning that I was the president
3 of the local and that things that they wanted to
4 do, if they had any question about them, please
5 check with me first, don't do it and then come back
6 and tell me what you have done.

7 We, of course, had our scrapes. I can
8 recall, for example, the night that I was
9 presenting or getting ready to present testimony on
10 the track system before the Board of Education, Joe
11 says, "You're not going to present that." I said,
12 "The hell I am not. I am going to present it."

13 And we had other squabbles. But basically we
14 worked very well together. We didn't get in each
15 other's way, and we were all for the purpose of
16 trying to organize the teachers which we
17 successfully did.

18 I came out of a classroom in December, 1965.
19 I realized that I was not doing a good job in the
20 classroom, and certainly was not being very
21 effective or as effective as I knew I could be with
22 the union. So, I asked for a leave of absence, and
23 I was granted leave of absence from my teaching

1 position in December, 1965, and I became full time
2 on the union staff.

3 Working with Mel Stack who had a year under
4 his belt in working with the teachers, and he hit
5 it off very well even though Mel did not come from
6 a teaching background, he was able to relate to the
7 teachers and they were able to relate to him. That
8 was when we started our school visitations. He
9 would do the noontime and after school and I would
10 make visits after school. That was '64-'65.

11 Mel and I talked and got an understanding as
12 to how I felt the best way would be to approach
13 teachers. And just simply you would present
14 yourself as a sincere individual, give them the
15 facts, don't try to do a snow job on them. Don't
16 try to lead them astray. Don't try to make them
17 any promises that you know that you can't keep, but
18 just simply level with them, find out what their
19 concerns are, and let's see what we can do to
20 alleviate some of those concerns, because some of
21 the problems could be addressed on the local school
22 level. Some of the problems had to be addressed to
23 the superintendent.

1 So, it was just his manner of approach to
2 teachers I think was the major thing in selling
3 him. He sold himself even though he did not come
4 out of a teaching background.

5 The basic point that we tried to get across
6 to teachers was that you could do something about
7 your problems. What I used to tell teachers time
8 and time again, just think about the civil rights
9 movement. As long as the blacks were in their
10 churches singing and praying and asking for help,
11 nothing was accomplished. But when they took to
12 the streets and started singing and praying, things
13 began to happen. As long as you sit in the
14 cafeteria or sit in the teachers' lounge and gripe
15 to each other, nothing is going to happen. But if
16 you get together, identify the problem and approach
17 the principal in a group, you're all together,
18 something is going to happen. And teachers listen
19 to that and began to do that about little things,
20 about discipline, about the lunchroom periods,
21 playground and what have you. And things began to
22 change.

23 The objective was to create a union chapter

1 in each of the schools. There were a few schools
2 in which we already had strong union chapters even
3 though there were still a number of teachers in
4 those schools who were not members of the union.
5 So, it was a matter of working I guess one on one.
6 I mean one on one, one building on one building at
7 a time, building up the union membership and the
8 confidence of the teachers at that time.

9 We really never talked about striking as
10 such. That really never entered the picture. I'll
11 tell you one thing that caught their attention,
12 that is the teachers' attention, the bus company
13 looking for drivers had a sign on the back of the
14 bus "Drivers wanted, 5,646 starting salary, high
15 school education."

16 At that time the teacher's salary was about
17 4900, and the question was, well, how can they
18 command a salary of 56 and we only get 49? We've
19 got four years college plus, and only a high school
20 diploma is needed for that. Well, the answer is
21 simple, they're organized. They move together as
22 one body, not as separate entities.

23 I was able to convince them that even though

1 the Congress established the salaries, if we had an
2 effective organized group, we would be able to do
3 something about that. And what happened in 1966,
4 Congress did pass a major salary reform act. Now,
5 there was a joint committee made up of the school
6 administrators, representatives from the union and
7 representatives from the DCEA that met for a year
8 and drew up the salary proposals, and we presented
9 those proposals and supported them as a group.
10 That measure passed, and I was able to use that as
11 an example, if we go down together rather than
12 separately, we can get the attention of Congress.

13 As for the strike, of course many of the
14 teachers were leery about striking. Striking to
15 them in many instances was unprofessional. So that
16 we did not dwell upon that at all, just simply
17 saying to them that if a strike would happen, it
18 would be your strike because you would vote on it.
19 If you voted not to strike, there would be no
20 strike.

21 Now, as far as professionalism is concerned,
22 I used to say to them that what is a professional?
23 How do you define a professional? And I used to

1 use the example of the professional golfer versus
2 the amateur golfer. Sometimes the amateur golfer
3 beats the professional golfer. However, because
4 he's an amateur, he can't get the money. I said
5 that's the only difference. I said no one can
6 confer a title on you. It's something that you
7 have to earn. And you can become a professional
8 when you are able to help to make the decisions
9 which are going to affect your working conditions.
10 That's when you become a professional, not because
11 you have a degree.

12 And just various things that we were able to
13 do. I remember, for example, a school in one of
14 the poorer sections of the city, the principal
15 refused to have a free lunch program. Every other
16 school in that community had a free lunch program.
17 We went to work on that, and we got a free lunch
18 program at that school.

19 When I say we went to work on it, I mean I
20 simply wrote letters to the superintendent on the
21 various problems as they arose making sure that I
22 had all of the documentation necessary so that our
23 arguments could not be blown into the water. And

1 by doing so, I was able to get a number of things
2 changed, things that people complained about
3 before, but nothing ever happened.

4 And doing that, oh, I can't recall all of the
5 various things, but there were little things such
6 as that. Oh, the one school where the basic track
7 children were still being segregated in the
8 cafeteria, wrote to the superintendent about that
9 and got that matter cleared up. Other instances
10 where teachers really were assigned 15 minutes to
11 eat lunch, and even though there was no prescribed
12 lunch period, we were able to get that changed so
13 they at least got half an hour each day in which
14 they could eat their lunch alone.

15 It was just a matter of pursuing these
16 matters before the superintendent and before the
17 Board of Education. One matter -- well, of course,
18 now I wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole, that
19 was smoking in schools. It was illegal for
20 teachers to smoke in schools. And by confronting
21 the Board of Education, we finally got a room
22 designated in which teachers could smoke. And I
23 can remember the newspaper articles that were

1 written about that. Bill Gold who no longer writes
2 for the Washington Post, and I had a running
3 dialogue on that matter. In doing this we built up
4 the confidence in the teachers.

5 Membership, when I took over as president of
6 the union, was somewhere in the neighborhood of
7 about 175, 200 teachers. We began to grow slowly,
8 and when we approached the election in 1967, we
9 were up to a membership of 1200 out of 6,000
10 teachers. But growth had been steady each year.
11 The national reps from the AFT worked out very
12 well. Of course, they were in and out as they had
13 other assignments. But as I said, by and large, we
14 got along very well, because I made it clear from
15 the very outset that I was running this show, and
16 you are going to work with me or you're not going
17 to work here at all.

18 I had asked the AFT for assistance because I
19 knew that we did not have experienced people within
20 the local, because nobody in the local had had any
21 experience in organizing as such. I would say
22 there were no major problems with AFT except that
23 AFT was used to doing things their way and they

1 would go into cities to organize and they would
2 simply take over the show and the local people
3 would report to them to get their assignments
4 rather than the other way around. And I simply
5 wanted to make it clear that it was -- I was not
6 going to blow this opportunity knowing my
7 constituents. There were certain things we could
8 do and there were certain things that we were not
9 going to do.

10 Well, for example, one time they wanted to
11 send telegrams so that they would arrive about
12 three o'clock in the morning to make it appear as
13 though the DCEA was carrying on some monkeyshines.
14 And I said no, we aren't going to play that kind of
15 game. It isn't necessary, we don't need to do
16 that. I said it's a waste of money for one thing,
17 and the other thing, I think you get teachers
18 angry. And there were things of that nature.

19 Or my testimony before the Board of
20 Education, they claimed that I was not vocal
21 enough, I was not pounding the table and doing all
22 of these kinds of things. I said I'm not going to
23 do that, that's not my nature, and no. Or they

1 didn't like what I was writing. I said, "Well,
2 this is my testimony, not yours. When I ask you to
3 write a paper for me, you do that," just things of
4 that nature. Nothing really major. Because as I
5 said, I established from the very beginning how the
6 show was going to be run.

7 Yes, we got money from the AFT. I suspect
8 that the election cost about \$250,000 plus, and
9 most of that big collective bargaining election
10 which began really in '64 through '67, cost over
11 \$250,000. And the bulk of that came from the
12 American Federation of Teachers. So that we had no
13 problem in getting assistance from the American
14 Federation of Teachers. Without that assistance
15 from them and from the Industrial Union Department,
16 we would not have been successful.

17 Having been rejected by the Board of
18 Education in the request for the adoption of the
19 executive order 10966 -- by the way, the Board of
20 Education could have done that, because the then
21 mayor, commissioner of the district, said that this
22 was legal. Of course, he had control over the
23 police, direct control over the police and fire

1 fighters. And they, of course, were not going to
2 be given collective bargaining rights by the mayor.
3 But then there were other agencies, the Board of
4 Education, the Recreation Department, the Armory
5 and the D.C. Library, other district agencies which
6 were independent agencies as such did have the
7 option of adopting the executive order if they so
8 wanted.

9 After the board turned us down, we then
10 decided that we would simply push the board for a
11 straight out CB election which we did. The board
12 finally agreed in March of '67 to have the
13 election.

14 We began to testify before the Board of
15 Education on the subject of collective bargaining.
16 We solicited the help of J. C. Turner who was then
17 the president of the Central Labor Council. He
18 joined us on many occasions approaching the Board
19 of Education. And we began to do some individual
20 lobbying of the members of the Board of Education,
21 talking to them separately. And I guess one of the
22 biggest pushes we got was the selection of Jack
23 Sessions who was then the assistant director of

1 education in the AFL-CIO. He became a member of
2 the Board of Education, and we had a spokesperson
3 on the board who knew about labor and could present
4 our position of labor to the board.

5 With Jack Sessions on the Board of Education,
6 our job then became easier, and we finally
7 convinced the board to vote on the matter. They
8 did, and the date was set for April 25th, 26th --
9 I'll get it right, April 26th, 1967. Meanwhile, as
10 far as Congress was concerned, we did pressure
11 Congress in terms of providing more money in the
12 budget for the Board of Education.

13 As a matter of fact, during one of the --
14 let's see, I guess it was 1966, every Monday
15 evening we used to go down after school and have a
16 demonstration across from the Capitol about the
17 school budget. Charlie Cogan joined us on many
18 occasions in those demonstrations. And we did go
19 to talk to the individual members on the District
20 Appropriations Subcommittee. But we never bothered
21 with Congress with respect to collective
22 bargaining. We learned that it was up to the Board
23 of Education to do this without any necessary

1 legislation for Congress. So, we pursued that
2 route in terms of getting collective bargaining.

3 At the time of the election, I guess our
4 membership had come up to about twelve, thirteen
5 hundred active members. But we had developed such
6 a good record over those past three years, that we
7 really didn't have too much of a difficult time in
8 winning the election. We won it by a three-to-two
9 margin. And that changed things for the school
10 system in the District of Columbia.

11 Following the victory, April 26, 1967, we had
12 a rapid spurt in growth of membership. By the end
13 of the school year in June, we had reached
14 membership of 2,000. One of the first things that
15 happened, a very interesting incident after the
16 election, it was said that we were out to oust the
17 superintendent, Carl Hanson.

18 We had a meeting with them two days after the
19 election, at which time we told them that certainly
20 we had no intentions of trying to oust him. While
21 we had many disagreements, one of which, of course,
22 had been the track plan, but that had, of course,
23 been outlawed a few months earlier by the

1 Scally-Wright decision on integration in the D.C.
2 public schools, but we were interested in getting
3 off to a good start and getting down to bargaining
4 about the many concerns which teachers had raised
5 during the campaign.

6 The first meeting that we had with the Board
7 of Education after the election was an interesting
8 one. The Board of Education had arranged a table
9 behind which the members of the board sat, and they
10 had put to the side a lectern for me to address the
11 Board of Education. I went to the lectern and told
12 them that this is a new day, we don't bargain
13 standing up, one side sitting down. We bargain by
14 sitting across the table from each other, and would
15 you be so kind as to make arrangements so that the
16 members of the negotiating team can have seats at
17 the table?

18 Needless to say, there was a bit of
19 consternation, but they rearranged the table and we
20 sat down and had a pleasant chat for the rest of
21 the evening. The then president of the Board of
22 Education made some comments about brothers and
23 sisters in a derogatory way, and he was immediately

1 jumped upon by Jack Sessions, letting him know in
2 no uncertain terms, that you don't talk about
3 brothers and sisters in a demeaning manner, "and
4 you of all people should know better than that as
5 you are a minister."

6 So, that was simply an introductory meeting,
7 and it ended on a good note. And then, oh, about
8 three weeks later we began our bargaining for our
9 first contract. The negotiations took place over
10 the summer. However, we were not able to reach an
11 agreement. We went on until the end of November,
12 and near the -- oh, let's see, I guess about the
13 20th of November I announced that we were going to
14 have a meeting right after Thanksgiving to make a
15 determination as to whether or not we could speed
16 things along, if we stop work for a little while,
17 in order to get a contract.

18 Well, fortunately for me -- I say fortunately
19 because we were not prepared to take any action --
20 it snowed on the day we were supposed to have the
21 meeting, and therefore, we couldn't have a meeting.
22 However, we did organize a sleep-in. And about 50
23 members, some with their children, came down to the

1 Board of Education that night and they had their
2 sleeping bags and whatnot, and we spent the night
3 down at the Board of Education.

4 In the meanwhile, I had sent a telegram to
5 Lyndon Johnson asking him to use his good offices
6 in order to help us out. He turned the matter over
7 to Joe Callifano who was then his assistant. And
8 the next night at about 11:30, the members of the
9 Board of Education came trekking into the board
10 room. Though we didn't accomplish anything, we did
11 get them out on a snowy night to meet with the
12 union. They said that they were not going to meet
13 with the union, we were going to meet with the
14 chief negotiator, and that was that. But they did
15 meet with us.

16 Well, shortly thereafter we were able to
17 conclude our first contract. We were fortunate in
18 that the Board of Education had hired a lawyer to
19 do the negotiating. That's usually a bad sign.
20 However, he was a very good lawyer. And because we
21 had done our homework on the issues and we were
22 able to present them in such a manner that they
23 could not be denied, he would turn to the

1 administration members on the team and ask them,
2 "Is that correct?" There wasn't anything they
3 could do but say yes. He said, "Well, if that's
4 so, give it to them, because you're wrong." And
5 that's the way it went.

6 So, we got a darned good contract in terms of
7 establishing a grievance procedure with binding
8 arbitration, getting a duty free lunch period every
9 day for all of the teachers, getting planning
10 periods for the elementary teachers who had never
11 had planning periods at all, setting up the school
12 chapter advisory committee, meeting with the
13 principal at least once a month to discuss
14 implementation of a contract as well as matters
15 relating to policies within the individual schools,
16 and so on that line, teachers on various
17 committees, selection of textbooks, curriculum and
18 so on.

19 In 1968, our last pay raise had been 1966,
20 and it seems as though nothing we did would make
21 the committees move on a pay bill. So, in 1968,
22 March 7th, about 2500 teachers did not report to
23 school, but rather assembled on Capitol Hill. And

1 we spent the day lobbying Congress. We got good
2 reception from some of the members and we were
3 scolded and berated by others who told us "Come
4 back after three o'clock, we'll talk to you, but we
5 will not talk to you now."

6 Very interesting incident, Mendel Rivers,
7 representative from South Carolina who used to be
8 the chairman of the Armed Services Committee -- and
9 there were many stories about Mendel and his
10 bourbon -- the group went in to see him, oh, I
11 guess about 9:15, and he was jumping up and down,
12 hollering and carrying on and what have you, and
13 one of the staff members said, "Look, he hadn't had
14 his eye opener yet, why don't you come back a
15 little later."

16 And sure enough, when they went back about an
17 hour later, he was just as calm, polite and
18 courteous. Well, we spent the whole day, we
19 finished up with a mass meeting with Ted Kennedy
20 spoke to the teachers. Out of that we got an 18
21 percent pay raise and that's when teachers really
22 began to understand the meaning of collective
23 action. We caught the school system by surprise.

1 They didn't know what to do, so they simply
2 declared the schools closed on account of
3 emergency. So no teacher lost pay, no teacher lost
4 any leave.

5 During the years of organizing, I of course
6 had to appear on the Hill to testify on many
7 measures, especially the appropriations for the
8 Board of Education. And I was able to make friends
9 with a number of the members of Congress, Don
10 Fraser, for example. A few years later, oh, in the
11 '70's, I got Don Fraser to introduce the first bill
12 for teachers' salaries only. Did not include the
13 administrators. Don Fraser, Andy Jacobs, Brock
14 Adams -- oh, golly, Abe Mitka from Chicago who's
15 now a judge, oh, many of them, I can't recall their
16 names at the moment, but I had been able to
17 establish a rapport with them.

18 There were members of Congress who had
19 compassion for the District of Columbia. Now, we
20 could not vote for them in any way, shape or form.
21 And it really didn't matter, but they cared about
22 the District of Columbia and were willing to take
23 time to address the problems. Now, Don -- well,

1 just because they cared. Don Fraser, for example,
2 could have gone off the District Committee. That's
3 what most of them do. They get on the District
4 Committee, that's the first assignment they do as
5 freshmen, and as soon as they get a bit of
6 seniority they move on. But Don Fraser stayed on
7 the district committee because he believed in the
8 District of Columbia and liked the people here.
9 And others did, too.

10 So, there were any number, and Senator Morris
11 was also a very good friend of the District of
12 Columbia. I even got to get on good terms with
13 Congressman from Kentucky, Bill Natcher (sp?) from
14 Kentucky. So that there are people who do care
15 about the District of Columbia, and they were
16 sympathetic to our cause.

17 But that came about only as after I knew that
18 I had to do this to go down to make testimony, and
19 while there I'd stop and get acquainted with the
20 staff members and be able to get a number of things
21 accomplished.

22 The union structure, of course, was
23 determined by the constitution, that is the union

1 officers, president, vice president, treasurer,
2 secretary, vice presidents for the various school
3 levels, and then members at large for specialized
4 subject areas.

5 Now, as far as the staff is concerned, there
6 were four reps, a legislative assistant and --
7 well, that was the basic staff, plus the
8 secretarial office help. So, we were not a heavily
9 staffed union, because I felt that we didn't need
10 that many people if we all did our jobs, and I of
11 course included myself as part of the staff because
12 I handled grievances, made school visitations, as
13 well as doing the other work of the union. So, we
14 had a very small staff, but we were able to get the
15 job done.

16 We have, the union has monthly membership
17 meetings from September through May with the
18 exception of December. The executive committee
19 meets at least once a month, more often twice or
20 three times a month. Matters are brought before
21 the executive committee, and if they are matters
22 that have to be acted upon immediately, the action
23 is taken by the executive committee and reported to

1 the membership. If it is something that can wait
2 until after the membership meeting, the matter is
3 brought before the membership and then a vote is
4 taken. Well, for example, the matter of opposing
5 the track system was a vote taken by the
6 membership.

7 No, we took votes by either voice vote or a
8 division if necessary. I am sorry to say that
9 unless there was some burning issue before the
10 membership, we would rarely get over two, 300
11 members at a meeting. So that it was very
12 difficult to do business. That's not unlike other
13 organizations, but of course if you had a burning
14 issue like a strike, you would have an overflowing
15 crowd.

16 Our first strike occurred in September, 1972.
17 I describe it as a strike that should not have
18 been. We had 18 months to go on the current
19 contract, and of course we had the usual no strike
20 provision in the contract. However, there was a
21 nucleus of members who kept harping on the point
22 that we are not a union until we have a strike. To
23 be sure, there were still some issues that needed

1 to be resolved. We had just gotten a tremendous
2 cutback in the school budget by Congress which
3 caused a shortage of teachers at the beginning of
4 the school year in '72. And there were many other
5 issues, but they were issues that we probably could
6 have resolved with our meetings with the
7 superintendent and the Board of Education, but
8 somehow or another, the feeling began to spread
9 among members that we had to have a strike.

10 I suspect that really what gave it impetus
11 was our building rep meeting which we have every
12 year just before the opening of school, and that
13 seemed to be the foremost topic in the informal
14 sessions. So that when we got back into the city,
15 the first week of school they asked for a meeting,
16 we had a meeting.

17 The issues were laid out -- well, not the
18 issues -- people griping about certain things, all
19 of that was brought out and the momentum build. We
20 then had another meeting which was a strike vote
21 meeting, and it was just about unanimous.

22 Well, to say that we were ill-prepared for
23 this strike would be putting it mildly. We went

1 out on a Monday, had a meeting with the Board of
2 Education all night long. We did reduce a number
3 of things to writing, and I figured that it was
4 about the best that we were going to get. So, I
5 had agreed to go on the television and radio and
6 announce that the strike was off and that the
7 teachers should report to work. That's when I
8 learned my lesson.

9 I got back to the union office with this
10 document in hand, and I met about 50 teachers who
11 proceeded to nail me to the wall. "You didn't call
12 the strike, we called the strike. You can't call
13 it off. We will call it off when we are ready,"
14 and so forth and so on. Well, I had not had any
15 sleep, and I just about fell out there.

16 My secretary rescued me from the mob. We had
17 a meeting that afternoon. I almost fell over but I
18 suddenly regained my composure, and said, "All
19 right, if you really mean to strike, I'll see you
20 on the line Wednesday morning."

21 Well, we had about, I would say about 50, 52
22 percent the first day. Wednesday morning it got up
23 to 70 percent and kept going on. But we had not

1 formulated any real demands.

2 As I said, the strike picked up Wednesday
3 morning to about 70 percent and it kept going up.
4 We had not taken the necessary measures at all, or
5 the preliminary measures in order to prepare for a
6 strike. We had not notified AFT, we had not
7 notified the Central Labor Council or anybody else.
8 We were simply out there. But fortunately the
9 Central Labor Council rallied behind us.

10 The mailmen stopped delivering mail, would
11 not cross the picket line. The Teamsters did not
12 cross the picket line. So that we had a good
13 community of support. The AFT sent in Chuck
14 Richards who was then on the national staff to
15 assist, and with his help we finally formulated
16 some issues. The negotiations did not take place
17 with the Board of Education, oddly enough. They
18 were involved in it, but the mayor, Mayor Walter
19 Washington and his chief labor negotiator, Don
20 Weinberg, really handled the negotiations. Because
21 in the meanwhile the Board of Education sought to
22 get an injunction and actually the court did order
23 us to cease and desist.

1 A very interesting thing, in meeting with the
2 judge, I told him that I would take his message to
3 the membership meeting that particular night and
4 then I would call him. He gave me a special number
5 to call him. And the membership voted no, and I
6 called the judge and I said, "I'm sorry, sir, but
7 we're still going to be out."

8 Now, a side light of that was, of course, the
9 beginning of the growth of opposition to me. And
10 what I found out later after the strike was over,
11 that the central reason for the strike was to get
12 me thrown in jail so that they could take over the
13 union. However, it didn't work that way. I was
14 sentenced to go to jail until I had agreed to purge
15 myself. But fortunately it was stayed, and by that
16 time, by the time of the next hearing, we had come
17 to an agreement.

18 Now, one of the interesting things was that
19 even though the community did not like a strike,
20 there was no effort on the part of the community to
21 organize to keep the schools open, none whatsoever.
22 I was also told later by a group of community
23 activists, that if I had gone to jail, there would

1 have been trouble in the town that night.

2 During my years as president of the union, I
3 always felt that it was incumbent upon me to be an
4 active part of the community. One of the things I
5 used to tell teachers was that as long as you stay
6 within the four walls of your classroom, nothing is
7 going to change outside, and therefore, nothing is
8 going to change inside your classroom. You've got
9 to become a part of the community.

10 I was an active participant on behalf of the
11 union in, you name it, all kinds of activities, the
12 Vietnam war protest, the PTA, speaking at forums
13 and what have you. I made it a conscientious
14 effort to be identified with the community, and
15 that paid off in this instant.

16 One thing I might add is that a reporter
17 asked a little girl why did she think that her
18 teacher was on strike, and the little girl's name
19 was Allison, and she said, "Well, I see my teacher
20 coming in every day with two shopping bags full of
21 materials, materials that she had to buy money out
22 of her own pocket, even so far as to buy pencils so
23 that we would have pencils to do our work in

1 school." And he did a very lovely editorial on
2 that, "Pencils for Allison," as to why the teachers
3 are on strike.

4 As I said, teachers had begun to feel their
5 oats. They were remembering four years ago in '68
6 when we closed down the schools to go down on
7 Capitol Hill and nothing happened, and they felt
8 that they could do pretty much the same and get
9 away scotfree. No one gave any thought to losing
10 the job or what have you. And while, as I said, we
11 did not have any issues, that is we did not
12 formulate anything to present to the Board of
13 Education and get a negative response that would
14 have caused that kind of reaction. It was just an
15 accumulation of things that had gone on. And as I
16 indicated, a terrific cut in the budget for the
17 Board of Education caused layoff of teachers.
18 Also, we had problems with supplies, et cetera, and
19 so on. And those things, it was just simply an
20 emotional pitch. And the people at the meeting, of
21 course, were on a high, and that was that.

22 I suppose another factor was that teachers
23 had become aware of the many strikes that had been

1 carried on by their fellow teachers in various
2 parts of the country. We took groups up to Newark
3 at the time that they were having difficulties. We
4 also took groups to Philadelphia. We went over to
5 Baltimore, and they were aware that teachers could
6 go on strike. And I suppose that was another major
7 factor in their decision. But it was really an
8 emotional kick, emotional high, I should say, that
9 they had gotten into and come hell or high water,
10 they were going to strike.

11 I would say that I was perceived as a person
12 with good balance, though I did not appear to be a
13 militant individual because I was not always
14 hooting and hollering, pounding on tables.
15 Nevertheless, I was firm in my convictions and
16 resolute in my desire to get things done and would
17 go ahead and get them done, taking what action
18 necessary whenever that time came. Now, we had
19 many strikes in schools.

20 Oh, I recall, for example, that one school
21 had a problem getting its trash and garbage picked
22 up. I told them, well, I'll be over there and
23 we'll just stand out until somebody comes and picks

1 up the trash and garbage, because it was becoming a
2 major problem, and do things like that. Or when
3 the group of teachers refused to stay in their
4 classrooms because windows had been broken out,
5 glass was on the floor, it was cold, and I told
6 them to take their classes to the auditorium and
7 try to hold the students there, which they did, and
8 stood by them all the way. We won that case in
9 arbitration, things like that. So they knew that
10 once I had decided to do something, that I was
11 going to do it. And militancy did not mean
12 shouting and banging on the table all the time.

13 I had been in office for eight years in 1972
14 at the time of the strike. Now, I had an
15 assistant, he's dead now, Charles Chang (sp?), he
16 died in that airplane accident in Chicago. Charlie
17 had been sent here from the Michigan Federation to
18 work in our collective bargaining campaign, and at
19 the end of the campaign George Brickhouse suggested
20 that he might be a good person to hire in order to
21 help things move along. Now, I hired Charlie, he
22 was a very effective worker.

23

TAPE III

1
2 MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene
3 Epstein. My interview with William Simons is
4 continuing on November 18th, 1986 in
5 Washington, D.C.

6 MR. WILLIAM SIMONS: Charlie had come
7 to me in May of that year and asked me to write him
8 a letter of recommendation to Harvard University
9 for the graduate studies program he wanted to
10 enroll for his PhD. I had gotten an inkling of
11 that from someone I knew that he had applied to
12 Harvard.

13 Well, at any rate, before I had gotten the
14 application, I realized that things were not moving
15 as they once were. So I asked Charlie one morning,
16 I said, "It looks as though we're beginning to have
17 some problems. There seems to be a concerted
18 effort to oppose just about everything that I put
19 forth." He said, "No, Bill, I don't think it's
20 that, I think that the members of the Executive
21 Committee wanted a little more opportunity to
22 express themselves and to be able to put forth
23 their points of view on issues." I said, "Well,

1 look, no one has ever stifled anyone from talking,
2 and I don't understand it." I said, "By the way,
3 where are you in all of this?" And he looked at me
4 and he said, "I'll give you my answer in about a
5 week." Which I thought was very odd.

6 But within that time the letter came in from
7 Harvard, so in effect he was gone. I thought it
8 was very odd that he would want to leave because in
9 his contract he had a provision for a sabbatical
10 for a year that would have given him 75 percent of
11 his pay. But instead, he decided to quit, he left.
12 However, he didn't leave until August, and that
13 was -- he was in attendance at our building rep
14 conference that year, this is 1972, before the
15 strike. And I dare say that he played a major role
16 in stirring up the people to call for a strike
17 vote.

18 Anyway, he left, the group continued to
19 function and they did everything that they could to
20 sabotage the strike. As I learned later, their
21 goal was to get me incarcerated so that they could
22 take over the union, but that didn't happen.

23 That group died out, disintegrated after

1 Charlie left. As a matter of fact, they had
2 invited Charlie to come back to speak at a rally
3 that we had scheduled for that Sunday. However, we
4 called off the rally because we had reached
5 settlement that Sunday. He came down anyway, I did
6 not see him, but he did not have any audience to
7 speak to.

8 We have never had political caucuses within
9 the union. There have been groups who have gotten
10 together from time to time, but nothing really on
11 an organized formal basis. I've had opposition I
12 guess every time that I've stood for election as
13 president of the union, and there were times when
14 the contests were very heated. But in spite of
15 that, while there are differences of opinion, there
16 are groups, small groups that meet, there's never
17 been any real basic split in the organization as
18 such, that is, in terms of organized opposition.
19 Now, I don't know why that was so, but anyway, that
20 is the way that it has been.

21 The group that organized then around the
22 candidate, who was a female, soon disintegrated. I
23 think that as long as an individual is capable of

1 providing effective leadership for an organization,
2 then there shouldn't be any question about how long
3 that individual serves as a leader of the
4 organization. Certainly I always presented myself
5 to the membership with the posture when you no
6 longer feel that I am effective, then, okay, I'm
7 ready to go, just tell me and I will step aside. I
8 certainly provided opportunities, at least I
9 thought I provided opportunities for new leadership
10 to develop.

11 Of course, one of the things that happened
12 along the way that a number of individuals that I
13 had tried to groom for leadership were lured away
14 into school officerships and left the union. But
15 certainly I did not try to keep everything under my
16 control whatsoever. I gave everyone ample
17 opportunity to learn all of the ins and outs and to
18 be able to be conversant. But, as I said, I see
19 nothing wrong with an individual staying in office
20 for a number of years, 21 years, as in my case, if
21 I'm capable of doing the things that are necessary
22 to keep the organization moving. And I feel that I
23 did do that in my term in office.

1 One of the interesting things that came out
2 of the 1972 strike was the establishment of a
3 scholarship fund from the fine that was levied
4 against the union for striking. I do not believe
5 that there is any other such scholarship fund in
6 the country. This happened in a very unusual
7 manner.

8 After the strike had been settled, the judge
9 asked me to come over to his chambers one day to
10 talk about a matter that was totally different from
11 the strike altogether. But while I was there, I
12 took the opportunity to mention to him the fact
13 that I thought that we ought to be able to do
14 something with that money other than just turning
15 it over to the U.S. Treasury, because that is where
16 all fines went at that time. And he said, "Yes,
17 what do you have in mind?" I said, "Well, we ought
18 to be able to do something for the children in the
19 school system, maybe setting up a scholarship fund
20 or something of that nature."

21 So he talked to the chief judge, who was then
22 Hal Green, that's the famous judge that broke up
23 AT&T. Hal Green was the chief judge of the

1 Superior Court of the District of Columbia at the
2 time. He researched it and found that there was no
3 bar to it. So, as a result, the \$50,000 was used
4 to establish a scholarship fund for graduating
5 seniors from high school. And thus far we have
6 been able to help 24 students from that fund, and
7 it's still going strong.

8 I might add that we were able to convince
9 Judge Gladys Kessler in 1979 to do the same thing
10 with the fine money that was assessed against us.
11 The fine had doubled by then. The first was
12 \$50,000, this was \$110,000. But it went into the
13 scholarship fund and the fund is growing.

14 One of the other interesting situations in
15 contract negotiations, in 1975 we were at a dead
16 lock in our negotiations. A strike vote had been
17 taken and the Executive Committee had been given
18 the authorization to call a strike at an
19 appropriate moment. This was in February of 1975.
20 The Central Labor Council, of course, had been kept
21 abreast of the developments. I at the time was
22 secretary of the Council, so I had kept them up to
23 date as to our negotiations.

1 So the Executive Committee asked to meet with
2 me to see what they could do to prevent a strike,
3 and they said, well, we ought to get the mayor
4 involved in this. The mayor had issued a statement
5 that he was not going to become involved in
6 negotiations, but if there should be a strike, then
7 he was going to move into action for the good of
8 his city. So we tried to prevail upon him, why
9 don't you move now before you have to take
10 emergency action.

11 Anyway, we met that Friday evening, and we
12 decided that what we would do would be to put out a
13 message on the wire that we will be meeting with
14 the mayor on Saturday in order to see if we
15 couldn't resolve the strike matter. The issue in
16 1975 was that the Board of Education wanted to
17 increase the school day and the school year but the
18 Board of Education still was powerless to grant pay
19 increases, and we were saying we had no problem
20 with increasing the time but we wanted to get the
21 necessary additional funds. And since you couldn't
22 guarantee that Congress was going to give us that,
23 we are not about to sign a pig in a poke or if we

1 get the money kind of deal. That was the major
2 issue.

3 At any rate, we contacted the AP and the UPI
4 and they put the message out. The mayor was
5 evidently going home that evening and heard the
6 message on the radio. He called us from his car
7 and said that he could not meet on Saturday, but
8 what about two o'clock Sunday in his office. We
9 said fine. We met with him on Sunday and we wrote
10 out an agreement to get the matter off dead center.
11 After we did that, the mayor called the president
12 of the Board of Education and had her come over to
13 sign the agreement, and in that way we averted a
14 strike in '75. The board president paid for it
15 with criticisms from her fellow members, and the
16 Board of Education adopted a resolution that from
17 henceforth no board member would participate
18 actively in negotiations.

19 We got over that hump and went on for
20 peaceful relations until 1979. By this time the
21 membership was about 5,000, out of then about
22 5,600. We had lost a number of teachers over the
23 years because of rifts. But we were well a

1 majority organization of teachers. We did not have
2 the agency shop at that time so that we could not
3 get any money from those 600 who were not members
4 of the union.

5 In 1979 there was a determined effort on the
6 part of the superintendent and the Board of
7 Education to really break the union. They played
8 hard ball all the way down the line, and in October
9 of '78 we had gathered in the Greater New Hope
10 Baptist Church prepared to go on strike at the time
11 when I got a call from the Board of Education that
12 they had agreed to extend the old contract for a
13 period of three months.

14 There was a change of leadership in the
15 superintendency. I might say that during the
16 period '67 through '77 we had six different
17 superintendents. Vincent Reed was appointed
18 superintendent. Vincent Reed had been the
19 personnel officer for the school system. He had
20 also been the assistant superintendent and
21 superintendent in charge of secondary schools. And
22 I thought that I had a very good working
23 relationship with him because we were able to do a

1 number of things together when he was in those
2 previous positions.

3 As a matter of fact, the day that he was
4 named superintendent he called me and came over to
5 the union office and he met with me and the general
6 vice president for about three hours and we talked
7 about the things that we could do together to get
8 the system turned around, et cetera. And I thought
9 we were off to a good start. But I soon found out
10 that we were not.

11 The first thing that happened was concerning
12 the textbook committees. Up until that time what
13 had been happening was that I would meet with the
14 superintendent in charge of instruction and we
15 would get together and make a list of committees of
16 textbooks, I would appoint the teachers and he
17 would appoint the school administrators. However,
18 when I sent the list back over this year, Vince
19 Reed said no, you're not going to do that. Who
20 gave the union authority to name teachers to
21 textbook committees. And we took that to the Labor
22 Relations Board as an unfair labor practice.
23 Because of what had been happening in previous

1 years, we lost that.

2 And from then on it was downhill. And
3 finally Superintendent Reed said no, in effect he
4 said, we're going to get rid of this damn union.

5 Well, the Board in October of '78 agreed to
6 extend the contract for four months. We continued
7 negotiating; however, in February of '79 it became
8 apparent that we were not going to get anywhere in
9 our negotiations, took a strike vote, and on March
10 5th we went out. That strike lasted for 23 days.

11 Again, we had good support from the
12 community. They didn't like the strike. They, of
13 course, would have rather seen the teachers in
14 school. And we settled the matter at the table,
15 but there was no organized effort on the part of
16 the community to try to keep the schools open.

17 We had at that time what we called a
18 community bulletin which I guess we had a
19 circulation of about a thousand, mostly
20 organizations, PTAs and other community groups,
21 civic associations and the like. So that we kept
22 the community abreast on what was happening with
23 our negotiations and other matters that we felt of

1 interest to them. So the community was well aware
2 of the problems that we were having in trying to
3 negotiate a new contract.

4 Well, AFT came to the assistance of the
5 local. I might say we never had any problem in
6 getting assistance from the AFT when we needed it.
7 By the same token, we had never asked the AFT to
8 forgive us for any back per capita. We paid all of
9 our debts to the national. They assisted us in
10 sending in Bob Bates to help with the negotiations,
11 Al Shanker spoke at one of our rallies, and many of
12 his staff people, Bob Porter and others
13 participated in many of our rallies. So that we
14 had full assistance from the AFT in that effort as
15 we had had in 1972.

16 This time was much different than in 1972.
17 In '72 I did not get a hold of the strike until
18 after about the fourth day and was able to get
19 things back in order and rode it on out in fine
20 style. This time we were very much organized. In
21 1975 when we had a near strike we had set in motion
22 a strike organization with the picket captains, the
23 area coordinators and the telephone networks. We

1 kept that in place from '75, so that in '79 the
2 only thing we had to do was to get some new names
3 because people had moved, some had retired, gone on
4 to other places. So we did have a mechanism so
5 that everything was definitely under control and
6 there was no confusion whatsoever in the 1979
7 strike, we'll say city-wide strike, and I guess
8 that at the height we had a 93 percent
9 participation. Towards the end, of course, it fell
10 down, as strikes always do. But we had a good high
11 level participation. There were no activities
12 going on in the schools whatsoever. The schools
13 were supposedly open but nothing was happening.

14 Things have changed considerably since 1979.
15 For one thing, we now have home rule or at least a
16 semblance of home rule in the District of Columbia,
17 a situation of which the Board of Education can
18 grant salary increases for teachers so we no longer
19 have to go to Congress. More importantly, the
20 District of Columbia government that enacted a
21 personnel law which provides for collective
22 bargaining for the unions, but it also calls for
23 binding arbitration instead of a strike. So that I

1 doubt if a strike could be successfully waged by
2 the teachers at this time.

3 Of course, several other things that have
4 happened, the attitude of the current
5 administration in the White House, the lingering
6 effects of what happened to the Air Traffic
7 Controllers is also important. And also the
8 attitude now of the country is different than it
9 used to be, and strikes are not tolerated as they
10 once were. Though that I would suspect that any
11 effort to try to get the teachers on strike at this
12 time would be futile.

13 Local 6 ordered the PATCO strikes, and I
14 participated in many of their rallies and
15 demonstrations, spoke at various forums supporting
16 the Air Traffic Controllers. I think we are seeing
17 the result of the action of the President in the
18 tragic situation in the air traffic today. There
19 isn't a day that goes by that we don't read or hear
20 about a near miss. And, of course, we know the
21 tragedy that happened in California a few weeks ago
22 when the large plane from Mexico hit a small plane
23 because of misdirection by an air traffic

1 controller.

2 I don't know what the situation is now with
3 the community and the union, whether the new
4 leadership has undertaken a concerted effort to
5 cultivate the community is unknown to me at this
6 time. But, as I said, I don't believe that a
7 successful strike by teachers could occur in
8 Washington, D.C. in 1986.

9 The election of 1985, I was a candidate. My
10 assistant ran against me and was able to con the
11 people and I was defeated. Though I've left the
12 union and I really have not had any dealings with
13 it whatsoever, so I really couldn't give an
14 accurate assessment as to what is going on, except
15 that I run into teachers every now and then in my
16 travels, and they are constantly complaining about
17 the things that are not being done. But I have no
18 personal knowledge about it.

19 Recalling the 1979 strike, there were a
20 series of meetings with the mayor of the city,
21 Marion Barry. He did all that he could to try to
22 bring the strike to an end. We had a meeting with
23 him and he told us that he would do everything that

1 he could to see to it that negotiations would get
2 back on track and that we should have a settlement
3 of the contract.

4 He met with us one Sunday morning at the
5 union office and explained his position in full. I
6 told him that I was sorry, I believed him, I
7 believed that he had our best interests at heart,
8 but what I was afraid of was that if we went back
9 to work he would then turn his attention to matters
10 that he had neglected because he'd been trying to
11 settle the strike and we would be left high and
12 dry. He did not like that, but nevertheless, that
13 was my response to him.

14 Now, that was a Sunday morning. We had a
15 mass rally scheduled for the church, Metropolitan
16 AME Church that Sunday afternoon. However, in the
17 meantime Judge Kessler had issued a back to work
18 order. I realize that we would not have enough
19 time to discuss the matter at the church because
20 they had a four o'clock service schedule. This was
21 during the Lenten season. So at twelve o'clock I
22 called around trying to find a place to meet. We
23 were finally able to get the Sheraton Washington

1 Hotel which did not have anything scheduled. Then
2 the problem was how do you notify people that there
3 is a change of the meeting place at that late date.
4 Once again, the media came to the rescue. I
5 contacted them, and they put out the notice that
6 the meeting site had changed. I sent some of the
7 staff members down to the church to let the people
8 know that the site had been changed.

9 I was afraid that people coming to the church
10 would say, oh, what's the use, I'm not going up to
11 the hotel. But on that Sunday afternoon 3,000
12 members showed up at the hotel. I presented the
13 proposition that the judge had laid out for us.
14 There was no recommendation from the Executive
15 Committee on the matter. I let the members decide.
16 And there was a unanimous vote that we would stay
17 out.

18 The mayor went to work again and evidently
19 went back to the judge with another proposal on
20 Monday. It was finally accepted by the judge on
21 Wednesday, that is, that we would go back to work
22 under the old contract and would have three months
23 in which to complete negotiations. That was

1 agreeable to the membership, and we returned to
2 work on March the 23rd.

3 My relationship with the media had been good.
4 On the next day after the election in 1967 I will
5 never forget meeting with two reporters from
6 Channel 4, that's WRSC-TV, Don Doke (sp?), and the
7 other name escapes me at the moment. But what they
8 said to me is that if you continue the way that you
9 have been over the past few months, you should not
10 have any problem with the media.

11 The one thing that you want to remember is do
12 not try to abuse the media, and at the same time
13 don't let the media abuse you. And I followed that
14 throughout my career and really never had any
15 problem getting my message across through the
16 media.

17 With the community, as I'd indicated earlier,
18 I made it a point to be in touch with all segments
19 of the community attending as many meetings as I
20 could, sending representatives to other meetings.
21 And in that way we built up a rapport with the
22 community which stood us in good stead during both
23 of the strikes.

1 And certainly with the politicians we
2 developed a very good relationship. The Washington
3 Teachers Union was the first union to endorse Mayor
4 Barry in his first attempt to become the leader of
5 the city. And he has never forgotten that.

6 I attended my first AFT convention in 1957.
7 The summer before I had attended an AFT workshop at
8 Pennsylvania State University. I, of course, was
9 feeling my way around the convention trying to get
10 a handle on what was going on in the national
11 organization. I did not join any caucus. My first
12 few years I attended meetings of all of the
13 caucuses in existence. However, I guess about
14 1960, '61 I began to gravitate towards the
15 progressive caucus. And in 1965 at the convention
16 at Los Angeles I was nominated as a candidate for
17 vice presidency, for a vice presidency on the
18 Executive Council. I won that election, and I
19 remained a vice president from 1965 until 1972, my
20 first split with the progressive caucus.

21 What happened was one of the staff members,
22 Ken Meeson (sp?) ran against Dave Seldon in the
23 election at Pittsburgh. There was a question as to

1 whether or not Dave Seldon received a majority
2 vote. It was ruled -- or at least that question
3 was put to a referendum, a roll call at the
4 convention.

5 I had made it clear from the very outset that
6 I never did and never would pressure the members of
7 the delegation from the local to join any
8 particular caucus or to take any particular stand
9 on any particular issue. I would present the facts
10 to them and then let them make their own judgment
11 as to how they were going to vote.

12 So that when the question came up at the
13 convention in 1970, once again I explained to the
14 delegation just what the situation was, and I left
15 it at that. Or when the votes were tallied, the
16 vote in the delegation was something like 64 to 6
17 against Dave Seldon. My votes went for Dave Seldon
18 because I had promised them my votes, and I told
19 them that's the only thing that I can promise you
20 that I will know that I can deliver. And one other
21 delegate's votes went to Dave Seldon.

22 Well, they became -- that is, the progressive
23 caucus became very furious with that vote.

1 Although I had been elected as a vice president in
2 1970, I knew that my time was up, and in 1972 in
3 St. Paul I lost and took a hiatus from the
4 Executive Council until 1976.

5 In the AFT there have always been various
6 caucuses. When I first joined or first attended
7 the AFT convention in 1957 they had the national
8 caucus, they had the classroom teachers caucus, and
9 the they had the progressive caucus. The national
10 caucus was the predominant caucus at the time. It
11 elected just about all of the vice presidents as
12 well as the president.

13 There began to be a break in the ranks of the
14 national caucus, and slowly but surely members of
15 the progressive caucus, a few members were elected
16 to the Council. But the vote was always
17 overwhelmingly in favor of the national caucus.

18 During the early days, I guess about the only
19 major difference that I could discern between the
20 caucuses was that you had the Midwest farm block
21 centered around Chicago and Minnesota, Iowa, as
22 opposed to the eastern block; New York,
23 Philadelphia, Detroit. We were not very strong in

1 the west at that time, but I noticed that many of
2 the delegates from Colorado were members of the
3 progressive caucus as well as many members from
4 California. I did not discern any ideological
5 differences between the caucuses, just a matter of
6 regional differences.

7 In 1964, this is the first time that one
8 caucus won the presidency and all of the seats on
9 the Executive Council. That was the convention in
10 Cleveland, and that was the beginning of Charlie
11 Cogan's term as president of the American
12 Federation of Teachers. As I indicated, I came on
13 the next year in 1965 in Los Angeles because Ray
14 Howe from Dearborn, Michigan resigned because he
15 became a college administrator.

16 From 1964 on the progressive caucus has been
17 the dominant caucus, though there have been other
18 caucuses formed for a short while and then died.
19 So that we had the position now that the
20 progressive caucus really comprises about
21 95 percent of the delegates. So today you have
22 differences within the caucus rather than
23 differences between the caucus. However, because

1 of the dominance of the people who support Al
2 Shanker, there's really very little dissension or
3 discussion of issues within the caucus. It's
4 really a matter of cut and dried. And I have
5 predicted that one day that caucus is going to
6 break up and there will be a shift in policies for
7 the American Federation of Teachers.

8 Two things happened in the AFT. I believe
9 1970 -- well, between 1970 and 1972, and those two
10 things were this: A change in the delegates'
11 strength, that is, the delegate voting strength at
12 the convention. Instead of voting merely the votes
13 of the delegates that had been elected for the
14 convention, the change was made so that you voted
15 the entire membership of the local. So that if a
16 local had 5,000 members and 35 delegates, that
17 local would have 5,000 votes. In case of New York
18 City, they had I believe at the time somewhere in
19 the neighborhood of 60,000 members, so they came to
20 the convention with 60,000 votes. So it was really
21 one man, one vote idea, but in this situation this
22 was certainly not democratic, because one place had
23 just about all of the votes.

1 The second change was going from the secret
2 ballot for the election of officers to the open
3 ballot. The reason that was given was that the
4 members back home who didn't come to the convention
5 had a right to know how each individual delegate
6 voted on the matter of the officers.

7 Those who favor the secret ballot claim that
8 the delegate is a representative of the local and,
9 therefore, the local has a right to know how the
10 delegate voted for an officer. That's all well and
11 good, and that would have been fine in the early
12 days of the American Federation of Teachers when
13 you had candidates to announce before the
14 convention, people traveled around the country
15 trying to sell themselves so that they could have
16 sufficient votes when the convention came in order
17 to succeed in their quest for office. However,
18 such is not the case. No one knows who is going to
19 run for office until you get to the convention. So
20 how can a local take a position on a candidate when
21 really there are no candidates until you get to the
22 convention.

23 I have asked just about every local around

1 the country is there a report given at the first
2 meeting in September on how the delegates voted for
3 officers. And the answer has been universally no.
4 My problem is the real reason for the open ballot
5 is to maintain control of the convention. Now, it
6 is said that in New York if anyone strayed from the
7 ticket that was put forth by the progressive
8 caucus, that individual would not get his expenses
9 paid nor would he ever be considered as a delegate
10 to another convention. And there have been other
11 locals that took similar action.

12 Another factor was many of the locals,
13 especially the smaller locals, were dependent upon
14 the AFT for financial assistance. And that was one
15 way of keeping them in check by having the open
16 ballot to determine how that local voted, and that
17 usually influenced whether or not that local
18 received the assistance requested. So that all in
19 all, there was no question about it, the purpose of
20 the open ballot was to maintain control. And this
21 was told to me a countless number of times that
22 that was the way it was going to be.

23 That is the tragedy of the situation. Of

1 course, I can only speak about Local 6 in terms of
2 not being compelled to do anything because of the
3 need of assistance from the national. I made sure
4 that after the collective bargaining election in
5 1967 we paid off all debts and all back per capita.
6 I didn't ask for any forgiveness. Therefore, I did
7 not need the help of the national, and we took an
8 independent course in terms of the elections and in
9 terms of issues.

10 Now, I have no problem with having delegates
11 being recorded on issues. But when it comes to
12 voting for people, I say no, it should be a secret
13 ballot. But by having the open ballot, that gave
14 the national office control over locals, not only
15 in terms of the election, but also in terms of
16 issues.

17 I can recall, I don't know how many hundreds
18 of delegates would meet me in the elevator or in
19 the halls of the hotel and tell me that they
20 supported my position, they only regret that they
21 could not vote for my position. And I said, "Well,
22 why tell me that you support my position if you
23 can't vote for my position?"

1 we didn't have any base, we could not go anywhere.

2 So that affirmative action meant a whole lot
3 to the black people. And I thought that the
4 organization should recognize that because it had a
5 considerable membership of blacks. However, we
6 were run over every time the issue was brought to
7 the floor. But I maintained that I was going to
8 support those issues that I believed in.

9 And basically the argument was that quotas
10 were bad for people because it meant an exclusion.
11 And as I have indicated, I can understand the
12 Jewish position, but then on the other hand the
13 Jewish people have to understand the black position
14 on the issue. Blacks were shut out completely in
15 many instances and no way could they get in.

16 I always use this example. When I walk into
17 a room for an interview for a job, I have
18 instantaneous recognition. They look at me as a
19 black period. Maybe they might discern that I have
20 on a suit and the way my hair is cut that I am a
21 man, but I am a black.

22 Now, a Jewish person can walk into a room,
23 not knowing the name, they see white, and it's only

1 after they begin to question the individual do they
2 find out the religious background of the
3 individual, et cetera, and then they go from there.
4 But I've got one strike on me when I walk into the
5 room, and there's no way that I can get rid of it.

6 It's a strange thing about the American
7 Federation of Teachers. At one time during its
8 history in the early '60s it was in the forefront
9 of the civil rights movement. In 1966 there was a
10 conference here in Washington, D.C. sponsored by
11 the American Federation of Teachers, Racism in
12 Education. And it to me was the most significant
13 conference that the American Federation of Teachers
14 has ever produced. I'm happy to say that I played
15 a role in that. We had John Hope Franklin, we had
16 Sterling Brown, John Killings, and you name it, all
17 of them were here and gave excellent presentations
18 pointing out the things wrong in society. From
19 that point on, the activities in the American
20 Federation of Teachers insofar as civil rights are
21 concerned were excellent.

22 However, moving on a few years later, I could
23 see a discernible change in the attitude of the

1 officers, the president of the AFT towards civil
2 rights. Take, for example, Richard Parish out of
3 New York who led the freedom school movement with
4 teachers going to Mississippi, into Prince Edward
5 County in Virginia. Dick was really a great fella.
6 But because Dick differed with the leadership in
7 New York in the Ocean Hill Brownsville strike, Dick
8 was crushed as a union person, as a human being.
9 And the funny thing about it, if you look at the
10 literature put out by the AFT now with respect to
11 civil rights, nowhere will you find the name of
12 Dick Parish. And to me, I say that that is a sin
13 and a shame.

14 No, I recognize that Ocean Hill Brownsville
15 was not a simple matter. However, I took the
16 viewpoint that if a community was really interested
17 and sincere in becoming actively involved in the
18 day-to-day operations of the school, then it was
19 incumbent upon the Board of Education and the union
20 to work with that community to devise a plan that
21 was going to insure the betterment of education in
22 that particular community.

23 Now, what we did in Washington, D.C. was

1 precisely that, so that we had no problem when the
2 people in Adams Morgan decided that they wanted a
3 community school board. We worked with them to
4 help develop the ideas that were necessary in order
5 to make it an effective project. Now, I recognize
6 that Washington, D.C. is an entirely different
7 location than New York City and the problems here
8 were not the problems in New York City. However, I
9 do feel that certain things shouldn't have been
10 done in New York City that were done, and it is my
11 understanding, for example, that the UFT printed a
12 piece of literature and made it appear as though
13 the black community put out that piece of
14 literature. And that to me certainly is an
15 unforgivable action on the part of the union.

16 Now, in 1976 I was asked to come back on the
17 Executive Council. Al Shanker met with me and met
18 with the Washington delegation asking me to come
19 back on the caucus, come back into the caucus and
20 then be elected to the Council.

21 I made it clear to him that I would come back
22 the same way that I left, on those issues which I
23 had a strong feeling about I was going to take my

1 position. Also, the only votes that I could
2 promise you would be my votes and no one else. I
3 would try to persuade the members of the delegation
4 to follow me, and 99 percent of the time they did
5 follow me on all issues. But they knew that they
6 were free to dissent at any time without any fear
7 of repercussions.

8 My feeling is that you elect delegates who
9 have a modicum of intelligence and are able to
10 reason for themselves. I also feel that if you are
11 providing good leadership and doing the things that
12 should be done, you don't have to worry about how
13 the votes are going. And I maintained that Al
14 Shanker could be reelected with a secret ballot
15 just as it is with an open ballot because he's
16 doing a very credible job, and you don't need that
17 kind of control over individuals.

18 Now, let me shift the scene if I may and talk
19 about the black caucus in the American Federation
20 of Teachers. That was borne out of frustration in
21 1967 at the convention here in Washington, D.C, the
22 black delegates felt that they were not getting a
23 fair shake from the AFT in terms of recognizing

1 peculiar needs that they had and addressing those
2 issues. That was also the time that there was a
3 shift in emphasis, beginning of a shift of emphasis
4 in the AFT from the civil rights movement going
5 back to the right, becoming more and more
6 conservative.

7 Now, the black caucus was formed in 1967. It
8 was not a political caucus. The black caucus did
9 not run candidates for office, but rather
10 concentrated on issues that were of importance to
11 it.

12 The caucus got off to a good start, and I
13 might say that it is still strong today. But
14 however, due to a shift in emphasis, that is,
15 nationally, I'm talking about the country in terms
16 of civil rights, some of the luster has worn off
17 the black caucus.

18 There were many issues that confronted the
19 nation and also confronted the union. We had a
20 difficult time getting the AFT to support busing as
21 a means of remedying the past practices of
22 segregation. Of course, on the whole question of
23 affirmative action I have talked about that

1 previously, the big question there was quotas, to
2 which the AFT was opposed as a body, yet this was a
3 very important issue for blacks because it meant
4 the opening of doors.

5 Now, the AFT's idea of affirmative action is
6 that you do recruiting, training and education and
7 what have you, however, if you look at their record
8 and you look at their staff, there hasn't been much
9 of that going on because there are very few
10 minorities that hold positions in the AFT.

11 A recent experience for me that was very
12 frustrating involves the senatorial candidate from
13 Maryland, Linda Chavez. Linda Chavez was on the
14 AFT staff for a number of years. It was very
15 difficult for me at that time to gauge just what
16 kind of a person she was. She was friendly and
17 pleasant with me, and we got along well. However,
18 when she left the AFT and became the executive
19 director of the Civil Rights Commission, either her
20 true feelings came out or she was changed because
21 she had then become a Republican.

22 Now, on several occasions I introduced
23 motions at Executive Council meetings simply

1 stating that the AFT should go on record as saying
2 that the views expressed by Linda Chavez in her
3 current position do not reflect the views of the
4 national organization. I couldn't get that motion
5 to complete --

6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

1 TAPE IV

2 MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene
3 Epstein. My interview with Bill Simons is
4 continuing on November 20th, 1986 in
5 Washington, D.C.

6 MR. WILLIAM SIMONS: My frustration was
7 that I could never get a majority vote on that
8 simple motion. I was not condemning Linda Chavez
9 in any way, shape or form. I was just simply
10 trying to let it be known that her views were not
11 the views of the AFT. Because in every newspaper
12 article that I saw it mentioned the fact that Linda
13 Chavez held a very high position in the American
14 Federation of Teachers. I had calls from all over
15 the country from union members wanting to know what
16 was going on, why isn't the AFT speaking out
17 disavowing those positions that she was stating.

18 Well, just about everything that she said,
19 she was opposed to affirmative action in any way,
20 shape or form. She was opposed to the Civil Rights
21 Commission taking an active role in trying to
22 address the problems of discrimination in the
23 country. You name it, she was against everything

1 that I thought was right.

2 It just seems to me that Al Shanker, while he
3 certainly was not supporting her at least openly,
4 did not want any action taken that would discredit
5 her. For what reasons, I don't know. But that's
6 an example of my frustrations in my latter years
7 with the American Federation of Teachers.

8 Let me say this, the convention in New York
9 City -- what was that, 1983 I believe was the
10 convention in New York. Yes, 1983, because the
11 next year we were here in D.C. and then we went on
12 to the two-year convention the next year. The
13 convention this year 1986 was held in Chicago.

14 Following the convention in 1983 at the
15 post-convention Executive Council meeting I was
16 berated, chastised, everything under the sun was
17 said about me. I got up and left the room and told
18 them that they could take the position and shove
19 it, because I didn't need it, I didn't need to be
20 on the Executive Council at all. And I suspect
21 that had I not had to make a stop at the john, I
22 would have been out of the hotel, back to my room
23 and on my way to the train station to come back to

1 Washington, D.C. But because I went to the john,
2 Bob Healey from Chicago looking for me caught me as
3 I came out of the john and pleaded with me to come
4 back into the room.

5 Now, the complaint against me was that I did
6 not support the positions of the progressive
7 caucus, I did not guarantee 100 percent vote from
8 the Washington delegation for the candidates or
9 positions of the progressive caucus and so on, and
10 they didn't understand how I could be allowed to
11 remain on the caucus. I told them, you can take
12 this job and shove it, I don't need it. I told you
13 my position when I came back to the caucus, and
14 that's going to be my position until I leave the
15 caucus.

16 The black caucus is still a viable
17 organization within the American Federation of
18 Teachers. Politically it doesn't have any clout
19 whatsoever. Now, there are many members of the
20 black caucus who are likewise members of the
21 progressive caucus. Well, there's a dichotomy in
22 the situation in that while they are very active
23 and vocal members of the black caucus, they are

1 also members of the progressive caucus, and they
2 are members of locals within the progressive caucus
3 who follow the party line right down to the hilt,
4 and because they put pressure -- the locals put
5 pressure on the delegates, then they become
6 ineffective in terms of trying to get the caucus
7 to -- the progressive caucus to change its
8 positions on certain issues.

9 So that while the black caucus raises issues
10 and takes positions on issues and speaks for those
11 issues on the convention floor, it still does not
12 have the power to convince a majority of the
13 delegates to support the positions that it takes.

14 The organizing of the paraprofessionals and
15 even the nurses and other allied health personnel
16 into the American Federation of Teachers is a very
17 significant one, a very positive one and a healthy
18 one for the organization. This means that a number
19 of workers who normally would not have had an
20 organization to which they could become affiliated
21 now have a home in the American Federation of
22 Teachers. I think it's a natural thing for the
23 paraprofessionals in the school system to become a

1 part of the teachers organization because, after
2 all, they are intimately involved in the
3 educational program in the schools. They work
4 closely with teachers, and they should be a part of
5 the teachers union.

6 In the early days there were problems in
7 organizing the paras. The problems came mainly
8 from teachers who resented the fact that here's
9 someone who didn't have a college degree in some
10 instances would be able to share the same lounge
11 facilities, and you name it, that sort of prejudice
12 within the teaching profession.

13 Today, however, I think that that has just
14 about dissipated, and the growing ranks of the
15 paraprofessionals within the national union is
16 significant. Though I welcome that, even though I
17 was unsuccessful here in Washington, D.C. in
18 getting the paraprofessionals as a part of the
19 teachers union. Just when I thought that
20 everything was all right in terms of the campaign
21 that we had started, AFSCME intervened in the
22 election by telling the paras that there's no way
23 you're going to get a fair shake with the teachers.

1 They voted for AFSCME instead of Local 6. However,
2 they regretted it in many instances, and all during
3 the time that I was president there wouldn't be a
4 week that went by that I didn't get a call from
5 some member of the AFSCME local asking me how to
6 resolve a problem.

7 One of the things that has happened around
8 the country which I guess originated in New York
9 City is giving the paras an opportunity to complete
10 their education. There are programs in which the
11 paras can enroll and take the necessary courses.
12 If they complete them successfully, then they can
13 move from the ranks of paras into the teaching
14 profession, and that has happened in any number of
15 instances. Even though we don't represent the
16 paras here, I know of at least ten former paras who
17 are now teachers because they took advantage of the
18 program that was really offered by the board of
19 education as well as AFSCME, which negotiated for
20 the paras here, and enabled them to get the
21 necessary credits and credentials to become
22 full-fledged teachers. And that is one of the
23 bright spots in the organization of the paras. It

1 gives them upward mobility and does not confine
2 them to the lower level for the rest of their lives
3 if they're interested in making a change.

4 Certainly during my years with the AFT I've
5 seen a change of relationship of the AFT to the
6 AFL-CIO. It has now become a very important
7 affiliate of the AFL-CIO, and for many years Al
8 Shanker has been a member of the Executive Council
9 of the AFL-CIO. I can remember under Dave Seldon's
10 years in office, Dave refused to become a member of
11 the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO. He claimed
12 that this would sort of compromise the independents
13 of the organization and he refused to do so, for
14 which he was censored by the Executive Council. As
15 a matter of fact, they tried to fire him, not only
16 for that reason but for other reasons also. But
17 for you the American Federation of Teachers is an
18 important part of the AFL-CIO.

19 An interesting experience of mine occurred in
20 1972. That was when the coalition of black trade
21 unionists was formed. A group of us met in Miami,
22 Florida. Bill Lucy, the Secretary-Treasurer of
23 AFSCME; Charlie Hayes, who was then a vice

1 president of the Amalgamated Meatcutters Union.
2 He's now congressman from the first district of
3 Chicago. Nelson Jack Edwards, who was then a vice
4 president of UAW. He has since departed, an
5 unfortunate accident took his life. Cleveland
6 Robinson of the Distributive Workers of New York,
7 and myself met in Miami, and we came to the
8 conclusion that the reelection of Richard Nixon
9 would not be good for blacks and minorities, nor
10 for the country. And we came to that position
11 based on his record, but we were also chagrined
12 that the AFL-CIO adopted a policy of neutrality in
13 the election of 1972. Of course, you know the
14 history of that and you know who turned out to be
15 right.

16 Dave Seldon was president of the AFT at that
17 time, and he wrote a scathing letter to Bill Lucy
18 asking him how did he get the nerve to select a
19 black from the American Federation of Teachers to
20 join another organization. Well, I wrote to Dave
21 and said, look, I am not representing the American
22 Federation of Teachers, I'm representing Bill
23 Simons as a black labor person seeking to try to do

1 something to get the AFL-CIO to recognize that they
2 have to change their policies in terms of involving
3 blacks in the labor movement.

4 Well, I did this on my own as an individual.
5 Now, to be sure, yes, I was a member of the
6 American Federation of Teachers, I was president of
7 the Washington Teachers Union. But this was
8 something that really did not concern the American
9 Federation of Teachers. I did not talk to Dave
10 Seldon because, as I said earlier, we had fallen
11 out in 1970 and I had no allegiance to him
12 whatsoever.

13 The other persons mentioned, Bill Lucy, yes,
14 he was the second officer in the American
15 Federation of State, County and Municipal
16 Employees; Nelson Jack Edwards, a vice president in
17 the United Auto Workers. Charlie Hayes in the
18 Amalgamated Meatcutters, and Cleveland Robinson of
19 the Distributive Workers. We didn't look upon our
20 being together as being representatives of our
21 representative unions. But we were blacks, we were
22 members of the labor movement, members of the
23 AFL-CIO, and we felt that the time was ripe to try

1 to put together an organization in order to call
2 attention to our problems and try to exert some
3 influence on the AFL-CIO to address the problems of
4 minorities in the labor movement.

5 Now, this was not the first time that this
6 has happened. You had the Negro American Labor
7 Congress, which was made up of blacks from various
8 unions that tried to do things. A. Philip Randolph
9 was a member of the Negro American Labor Congress.
10 So this was not anything new, it's just that over
11 the years the many black caucuses you might call it
12 had tried to do the same thing but they had all
13 eventually petered out. And we thought it was time
14 once again to try to revive the minority interest
15 or minority caucus within the labor movement to
16 call attention to the fact that the AFL-CIO was
17 really not addressing the problems of minorities in
18 the labor movement. This, I might add, was not a
19 separatist movement in any way, shape or form.

20 What we were trying to do was get the AFL-CIO
21 to address the problems of minorities, not only in
22 the labor movement but in society as a whole. One
23 of the things that we were greatly concerned about

1 was the lack of minority representation in the
2 leadership of the international unions and on the
3 AFL-CIO Executive Council itself. I don't know
4 whether we should take full credit for it or not,
5 but it wasn't until after we began to push our
6 platform, a woman was elected to the Executive
7 Council of the AFL-CIO.

8 Then later on you had a black woman from the
9 American Federation of Government Employees, who is
10 now a member of the Executive Council, Barbara
11 Hutchison. Also we have seen an increase in the
12 number of blacks who are now on the executive
13 boards of the various international unions. Leon
14 Lynch, for example is now a vice president of the
15 United Steelworkers. Marc Stepp has become a very
16 important cog in the United Auto Workers. He's the
17 head of the bargaining committee for the Chrysler
18 workers. So that we feel that we have made a
19 difference.

20 We also were able to help convince the
21 AFL-CIO that its policy with regard to South Africa
22 was not a healthy one, and gradually it has changed
23 and really become a very vocal opponent of

1 apartheid in South Africa.

2 I suspect that the AFL-CIO is a political
3 animal, the same as many other organizations, and
4 change in policy comes about as a result of taking
5 a careful look of what is happening around them and
6 realizing that an adjustment is needed in policy in
7 order to keep up with the times.

8 One of the things that I might add is this,
9 that unlike the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which
10 is funded just about completely by the AFL-CIO.
11 The coalition of black trade unions does not get
12 any money from the AFL-CIO, therefore, we can be
13 independent in our positions because we are not
14 beholding unto any group.

15 It is interesting to note today that there
16 has been a change in the position of the AFT in
17 regards to the coalition of black trade unionists.
18 At first the AFT was totally opposed to the concept
19 stating that the A. Philip Randolph Institute was
20 set up to represent the interests of black workers
21 in the labor movement. And, of course, we know
22 that the A. Philip Randolph Institute is simply an
23 appendage of the AFL-CIO. And since it's beholding

1 to the AFL-CIO, it essential doesn't step out of
2 line on issues and make statements contrary to the
3 policy of the AFL-CIO.

4 I know at one time I asked that the AFT give
5 \$5,000 to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists,
6 and you can imagine the reaction to that
7 suggestion. However, in later years Al Shanker has
8 spoken favorably about the Coalition of Black Trade
9 Unionists, has indicated that he and Bill Lucy have
10 been together on many issues, and so this is a
11 change of opinion about the Coalition of Black
12 Trade Unionists within the AFT.

13 Looking at another subject insofar as the AFT
14 is concerned, and that is the question of merger
15 with the National Education Association. This has
16 been on the agenda for many years. Dave Seldon
17 tried his darnedest to effectuate a merger of the
18 two organizations. I opposed merger at that time
19 on the grounds that the AFT was not in a position
20 to extract favorable terms from any merger. I put
21 it in this way, in terms of a merger, he who has
22 the most gets the most. He who has the least,
23 gives the most.

1 Another objection that I had to the merger at
2 that time was the fact that what would happen to
3 the minorities in the AFT, we were the minorities
4 in a minority organization, and going into a larger
5 organization we would be a further minority within
6 the whole structure of a merged organization.

7 I had followed very carefully the so-called
8 mergers of the black and white affiliates of the
9 NEA, and in each case what happened was that the
10 whites simply took over all of the property and
11 possessions of the black organizations in turn for
12 giving them a few representative seats on the
13 governing board. Where black leaders were
14 prominent, the NEA took them out of that situation
15 so that they would not be able to compete against a
16 white.

17 One classic example is Rubert Picot (sp?) who
18 was the head of the Virginia Teachers Association,
19 as opposed to the Virginia Education Association.
20 After the merger, in order to prevent Rubert from
21 trying to gain control of the organization, they
22 brought him to Washington. The same thing is true
23 of Sam Ethridge down in Alabama with the American

1 Teachers Association. He was brought to
2 Washington.

3 So the election that had taken place led me
4 to believe that in spite of the large number of
5 blacks in the association in the south, we
6 certainly would not get a fair shake in the deal.

7 Now, nothing came of the efforts of Dave
8 Seldon, and under Al Shanker initially he was
9 opposed to merger and he dropped the program
10 altogether. However, somewhere along the way he
11 changed his mind, and actually for awhile when he
12 merged the New York State Teachers, UFT became a
13 part of the NEA, and Al attended a few NEA
14 conventions. That was not unlike my early career
15 when I used to attend the NEA conventions in June,
16 and in August I would come to the AFT conventions.

17 However, that marriage didn't work. They
18 separated. However, New York gained from that in
19 keeping a number of the former NEA locals in the
20 state as a part of the New York State Teachers.

21 Now, that was my point. New York could
22 withstand a merger at the time of Dave Seldon,
23 because it was the stronger organization within the

1 state. Rhode Island had a chance of being the
2 dominant organization under merger situation.
3 Massachusetts was in pretty good condition. Of
4 course, there was no question about
5 Washington, D.C. because there wasn't an NEA
6 organization locally at that time. However,
7 leaving those places and going across the country
8 it would have been the union being swallowed up by
9 the associations.

10 Today I think the climate has changed, and I
11 think that there really should be a closer look at
12 the subject of merger. With teachers being
13 whipsawed back and forth all across the nation with
14 the inadequate funding, both from the federal level
15 as well as the state level for education, I think a
16 strong teachers movement would be able to change
17 that in many instances.

18 And then too, the AFT is in a much stronger
19 position today to exact from merger negotiations
20 favorable terms for the union members.

21 The differences between the organizations has
22 narrowed considerably over the years. And in many
23 instances the NEA is considered as a liberal

1 organization, and the AFT is considered as a
2 conservative organization. There have been
3 instances where the AFT and the NEA were on the
4 opposite sides of the question. For example, the
5 case in Kalamazoo, Michigan in which black teachers
6 were retained who had less seniority than white
7 teachers in order to promote integration. The AFT
8 supported the Kalamazoo union which wanted to
9 maintain strict seniority. On the other hand, the
10 NEA supported the concept that this was a
11 negotiated agreement between Kalamazoo and the
12 Board of Education and, therefore, the black clause
13 in the agreement should be honored.

14 You could cite any number of instances where
15 there has been a shift, the NEA on the left and the
16 AFT on the right. But in spite of that, I think
17 that the time is ripe for a merger. As far as Al
18 Shanker is concerned, I think he would be able to
19 survive any merger in a leadership role.

20 I might say this, that he survived, for
21 example, reelection within the AFT, though he gave
22 up his power base. This was one of the things that
23 I had fought for a long time. I said that the AFT

1 was an important organization, it needed a
2 full-time president, and that really he could not
3 devote full attention to the American Federation of
4 Teachers as long as he was president of the largest
5 local in the American Federation of Teachers, the
6 United Federation of Teachers. However, I was
7 unsuccessful in getting a change on the convention
8 floor over the years. But nevertheless, it
9 eventually happened when he gave up the position
10 and Sandra Feldman is now president of the UFT, and
11 Al can now devote his full time to the American
12 Federation of Teachers.

13 It's very interesting, the new agenda of the
14 American Federation of Teachers, and there are many
15 within the American Federation of Teachers who
16 claim that it is Al's agenda that he has fostered
17 upon the American Federation of Teachers. The
18 interesting point is that many of the things that
19 Al is now embracing are things that the Washington
20 Teachers Union had negotiated in its early
21 contracts. The only difference is that we were not
22 sophisticated enough to really make them work. We
23 had them on paper but we really never gave body to

1 them.

2 Now, you take, for example, Al has come
3 around to the question of supporting in a sense the
4 question of merit pay. The contract that we
5 negotiated in 1981, and the Board of Education
6 wanted a provision that would put a gate you might
7 say at Step 6. In other words, a teacher coming in,
8 Step 1 would go automatically with a satisfactory
9 rating onto Step 6. However, in order to go from
10 Step 6 on, the teacher had to get a better than
11 satisfactory rating.

12 I was really chastised severely about that,
13 among other provisions. But my point was this,
14 that we negotiated earlier the evaluation process
15 for teachers, that is, the union help to develop
16 and monitor the evaluation process, we had teachers
17 involved in the evaluation process. And my
18 position was that as long as we maintained control
19 of the evaluation process, that we could protect
20 teachers from arbitrary and capricious ratings.
21 And I might add that when I left office, no teacher
22 had been -- no new teacher had been denied a step
23 increase from Step 6 to Step 7, because we took

1 care of that.

2 And there were a number of other things that
3 we had done. I can go back, if I may, to the
4 question of teachers being involved in evaluation.
5 I was criticized very severely for that when we
6 first introduced the idea of that. And I can
7 recall one convention I had that program on my
8 agenda for the local, and Dal Lawrence in Toledo,
9 Ohio, had the program having teachers assist
10 teachers -- the master teacher concept. They ran
11 both of us out of the room. Oh, I guess this must
12 have been around 1972 when --

13 Why the organization, that is, the American
14 Federation of Teachers was not receptive to these
15 ideas, I don't know. I suspect that it was a
16 matter of maintaining the status quo. I can recall
17 individual delegates to whom I spoke about my ideas
18 being very upset saying no way do we want to be a
19 part of teachers evaluating other teachers. That's
20 a matter of management and you've got a union
21 member turning in another union member for failing
22 to do a proper job.

23 It's very interesting that, as I said, after

1 negotiating the last contract, I was severely
2 chastised by the members of the Executive Council
3 of the American Federation of Teachers and even Al
4 himself. However, the times had changed, and many
5 of the ideas which I had put forth before are now
6 being embraced by the union. So at the convention
7 in San Francisco, 1983, I said to Al, "Gee, it is
8 really heartening to see that the ideas that I had
9 put forth over the years are now being embraced by
10 the organization." His response was, "Touche."

11 I looked upon the unionization of teachers as
12 an opportunity for teachers to become a part of the
13 decision making process. To me, that was what
14 professionalism was all about, one who is involved
15 in making a determination of what, how, when, and
16 where you were going to carry out that which you
17 were practicing. Unlike lawyers and doctors who
18 are individuals who can set their own fees and
19 their own hours, teachers, of course, were public
20 employees and had a board of education, as well as
21 laws that governed their occupation. However,
22 within that framework, teachers could negotiate any
23 number of articles within a contract that would

1 give them a voice in the decision making process.
2 And the more that teachers became involved in the
3 decision making process, the more professional they
4 would really be.

5 Times are changed, and unions have had to
6 change. However, from the very outset, using the
7 premise that teachers ought to be involved in
8 decision making process as often as possible,
9 contracts negotiated by this union did precisely
10 that. And I suspected one of the reasons that we
11 were able to do that was because up until 1980,
12 '81, we could not negotiate for salaries. So it
13 was not a question of what do you want, more money
14 for your members or more of a voice in the decision
15 making process.

16 This unique situation in that neither the
17 Board of Education nor the city government really
18 could establish salaries for teachers. In
19 Washington, D.C. it made it possible for this union
20 to focus on educational policy. And that is what
21 we did. It never came down to the final crunch as
22 it did around the country, what do you want, more
23 money or more say in educational policy.

1 Everything we did had to do with the educational
2 policy of the system. So I suppose that is why we
3 were leaders in this arena and why the many ideas
4 that are now coming forth as education reform were
5 ideas that we had already experimented with in the
6 early '60s and '70s here in Washington, D.C.

7 Now, times have changed, and unions have had
8 to change. Unions have been established. They
9 have made their point and they are here to stay,
10 they're not going away. However, in refocusing on
11 the professional issues, because we are established
12 now, they are able to do that without any fear that
13 they're going to be demolished. And I suspect that
14 this is the reason why there has been a shift in
15 emphasis in the American Federation of Teachers to
16 embrace many of the ideas and to put forth new
17 ideas in terms of educational reform. It's really
18 a move towards professionalizing the teaching
19 occupation today, which was not possible in the
20 early days of the formation of the union.

21 Not only is this true with the American
22 Federation of Teachers, but it's also true with
23 other unions. They realize that times have changed

1 and they have taken a different approach in
2 negotiations, and they are looking at areas that
3 were unheard of in the early days of the union
4 movement.

5 For example, you take the United Auto
6 Workers, they have a seat on the board of Chrysler
7 Corporation. Now, who would have heard or thought
8 of a labor leader sitting on a board of directors
9 of a corporation with which it negotiates
10 contracts. This might be attributed to the fact
11 that there has been a considerable decline in
12 manufacturing in the United States. Just about
13 every industry is hurting. The basic industries,
14 steel, textile, automobile manufacturing, you name
15 it, all of the industries are hurting. So as a
16 result, unions realize that they simply cannot take
17 an adversarial position and expect to come out on
18 top. We've seen, for example, the negotiations
19 with General Motors for a new plant that is to open
20 in Tennessee. They've made several concessions
21 that would be unheard of. They are becoming a part
22 of "management" in the sense in determining the
23 quality of work of individuals on the assembly

1 line.

2 In shifting back to education, we've seen now
3 a great demand for "accountability" of teachers
4 because of the realization that there are too many
5 students who go through school and end up after 12
6 years unable to read, write or do simple
7 arithmetic.

8 Now, accountability is fine, but unions
9 realize that you can't have it as a one-way street,
10 someone looking over your shoulder and checking you
11 for what you're doing. So in order to address the
12 area of accountability, unions are negotiating
13 provisions in the contract which help them to
14 become a part of the decision making process. And
15 if they are part of a decision making process,
16 certainly they are going to be accountable for what
17 they do because it's their program, and certainly
18 they don't want to be failures.

19 And this is one of the things that I stress
20 over and over again. Don't conceive a program and
21 then shove it on the teacher and expect it to be
22 implemented properly. If teachers are a part of
23 the process in developing a program, the success

1 ratio is going to increase because nobody wants to
2 be associated with failure.

3 Just as we've seen changes in education, we
4 have seen changes in the so-called industrial
5 unions. As I had stated earlier, the new contract
6 that was negotiated by the United Auto Workers with
7 General Motors for the new Saturn plant in
8 Tennessee is an example of how workers realize that
9 they have to make changes in bargaining, and
10 management also realizes that it has to make
11 changes in the way that it has dealt with the
12 workers over the years. And as a result, we have a
13 coming together of workers and management in
14 devising ways and means of assuring a quality
15 product at the same time involving both the worker
16 and the manager in the decision making process.
17 And I think that this is healthy. And the more
18 that we do this, I think that we will begin to see
19 a change in society as a whole.

20 (END OF TAPE IV)

21
22
23