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TAPED INTERVIEW

OF

CHARLES SMITH
MARY SMITH

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

March 18, 1987

A STENOGRAPHIC RECORD
By: James P. Connor
Notary Public



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1 TAPE 1, MARCH 18, 1987

2 MS. RENE EPSTEIN: My name is Rene
3 Epstein. The following joint interview with
4 Charles and Mary Smith is taking place on March
5 18th, 1987 in Chicago, Illinois. This interview is
6 part of an oral history project contracted by the
7 American Federation of Teachers.

8 MR. CHARLES SMITH: I'm going to be
9 talking for a few minutes about some activities
10 that I have been very deeply involved in for the
11 last 30 years. Prior to those 30 years there's not
12 a great deal in my background that would lead
13 anyone to believe that I would be so intensely
14 devoted to a cause as I have the cause of teacher
15 unionism.

16 I was born and grew up in a rural Texas
17 community. My parents, my father ran a small
18 grocery store, and there wasn't anything in his
19 politics or his background to think that I would be
20 an active unionist and a rebel and a troublemaker
21 so many years of my life.

22 My father was a lifelong Democrat, and during
23 my early years, of course, lifelong Democrat meant

1 strong supporter of President Franklin Delano
2 Roosevelt. I think that was the extent of my
3 father's interest in politics because politics was
4 never discussed at home.

5 During the period of time when I was young,
6 my father did show evidences that he did have real
7 concern, a social concern about the people in our
8 community. I said he ran a small grocery store,
9 and during those years, the hardest hit years of
10 the Depression. We lived in a rural community, and
11 of course, the farmers there just weren't making
12 it, so they frequently had to resort to credit in
13 order to be able to put food on the table. My
14 father running the only grocery store in the
15 community allowed farmers to run up big tabs which
16 eventually led to his own bankruptcy.

17 That shows the kind of a level of concern
18 that he had. So, with that kind of early
19 background, I presume would have led me to be more
20 than average interested in the kind of activities
21 that I have been involved in in the years since.

22 MS. MARY SMITH: I grew up in the same
23 county, Runnels County in west Texas that Charles

1 did. We had similar backgrounds in that we both
2 went to country schools. We had similar background
3 in that both of our forbearers came from Arkansas.
4 And we never met officially, but we grew up in the
5 same environment.

6 My mother was a teacher. She taught for
7 seven years before she was married. Her sisters
8 and brothers taught. Therefore, we talked about
9 teaching and the conditions of teaching in Texas
10 throughout my young life. We went to segregated
11 schools. There were no black people living in our
12 immediate community at all. In fact, even the
13 Latin American people that lived in the area went
14 to segregated schools. So that I knew no blacks as
15 a child growing up.

16 My first experience with black people was
17 when I was going to college, and I worked for the
18 Young Women's Christian Association which had an
19 integrated staff. At that time I worked alongside
20 black people who in some instance were making the
21 same salary I had even though they had Master's
22 degrees and I was fresh out of high school. But I
23 learned to get acquainted with them and to work

1 with them as people. As I went through college, I
2 continued to work and assumed a professional
3 position on the staff.

4 So, I went to conventions, went to meetings
5 with the two black members of the staff. I think
6 my basic changes came when I was a student at Texas
7 Christian University when I had what must have been
8 a socialist social studies teacher, her name was
9 Sherrer, who opened my eyes to a lot of things that
10 I had never been aware of before, such as the
11 questions of race, such as the questions of unions,
12 such as the questions of why we needed unions, why
13 we needed a social conscience that we didn't have
14 in Texas.

15 I'm sure that my parents -- I don't remember
16 any racism taught in my parents' home. I don't
17 remember any anti-black talk, but it was I'm sure
18 the experience with the Y and the Texas Christian
19 University teacher that opened my eyes and made me
20 ask questions that I never had asked before. This
21 was before I met Charles.

22 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Mary went to Norton
23 School in Runnels County, and I went to Maselin

1 School (phonetic) in Norton County. We were
2 competitive in softball and basketball, but we
3 never met. We met at the University of Oklahoma
4 where we became interested in each other, married,
5 and transferred to North Texas State University
6 where we both graduated on the same date. This was
7 back in 1949.

8 I took a job, and it was a very good job at a
9 little town called Denver City at a time in Texas
10 when the State's salaries were \$2400, Denver City
11 paid \$400 above state scale. And at that time when
12 we just graduated from school, that \$400 looked
13 pretty large. Denver City was an interesting
14 community. It's out on the south planes of Texas
15 where the wind blew and the dust blew every day of
16 the year. They did have some trouble in keeping
17 teachers there, not only because of the location of
18 the town, but because of the conditions in the
19 school.

20 In many ways it was an ideal place because it
21 was a small school and you got to know everybody on
22 the faculty. But we taught under a contract which
23 provided that the contract could be terminated by

1 30 day written notice. They didn't have to give a
2 cause for the termination of the contract. Well,
3 that didn't create any problem, but you are aware
4 of, you know, where you stand in a situation like
5 that, that teachers have no rights. So, my
6 experience at Denver City wasn't totally happy,
7 that being one of the reasons.

8 I left Denver City and Mary and I picked up
9 and went to Ft. Worth where we both got teaching
10 jobs. And again, teaching conditions were less
11 than ideal.

12 Mary took a job as an elementary teacher and
13 I took a job in a junior high school. Of course,
14 there were teacher organizations in Texas. We both
15 belonged to the Texas State Teachers Association,
16 TSTA. That wasn't a matter of choice with us. In
17 fact, one year I decided to test the
18 superintendent's resolve, and when he announced
19 that we had always been a hundred percent at a
20 faculty meeting and that we should send up our
21 checks and join the Texas State Teachers
22 Association for that year, I didn't send in my
23 check.

1 A few days went by and the principal notified
2 me that the superintendent had noticed that I had
3 not sent in my check for my annual dues to TSTA. I
4 said, well, I hadn't intended to join this year,
5 and asked him to report that to the superintendent,
6 that I wouldn't be sending my check in. A couple
7 days went by and the superintendent of schools
8 appeared at my door during teaching hours, and
9 said, Mr. Smith, I'd like to have your check for
10 your TSTA dues. I whipped out my checkbook and
11 wrote him a check.

12 To give you some idea about the expectation
13 of the administration, in belonging to what they
14 called a professional organization as if there were
15 some value in it for the teachers, and of course,
16 it was obvious that those organizations had nothing
17 to do with teachers. The superintendent is the one
18 that sponsored them, he's the one that represented
19 the school corporation. So that as far as having a
20 teachers organization, there was none. Because
21 there was no teachers organization, I set about to
22 find out more about the organization and how
23 perhaps there could be more teacher input into the

1 operation of the organization.

2 I did attend some meetings as an observer and
3 saw my principal and superintendent representing my
4 school corporation, my having no standing at the
5 meeting at all. Of course, that was very
6 disenchanting. While I had been in college, I had
7 been active in several campus organizations, and
8 one of them was Future Teachers of America. My
9 early experience there had led me to believe that
10 there was a teachers organization out here, and
11 that that teachers organization had something to do
12 with teaching and the conditions of teaching.

13 The Future Teachers Association was an arm of
14 the Texas State Teachers Association and the NEA.
15 As far as any knowledge or information about
16 teacher unionism, we had none at all. I learned
17 from experience as a teacher there in White
18 Settlement just outside of Ft. Worth, that there
19 was a real need for a teachers organization that
20 had something to do with teaching and the
21 conditions of teaching.

22 Mary has what I think is one of the best
23 examples of what happened in schools in Texas and

1 the lack of teacher input into what happened to
2 them in an incident that occurred in her school. I
3 am going to let her tell that story.

4 MS. MARY SMITH: I was a sixth grade
5 teacher in Texas. I had, oh, 37 children that were
6 in tied-down desks, and they had a hard time
7 getting into any kind of a reading group. I moved
8 some folding chairs from the auditorium so that we
9 could sit in the folding chairs anyplace where we
10 could find space for them to sit in their reading
11 group. I was informed by the custodian that I was
12 going to have to get those chairs out of there
13 because he wasn't going to sweep the room, and the
14 superintendent told him he didn't have to if I
15 didn't move them out.

16 I went to the principal and said, please, do
17 I have to move the chairs out? And his answer was,
18 "He's an old man, Mrs. Smith. Humor him." So, I
19 moved the chairs.

20 Another teacher who refused to move her
21 chairs swept her own room because she didn't get
22 her room swept any more.

23 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Our whole

1 experience in teaching in Texas led us to think
2 that the teaching that we had planned for was
3 something other than what we were actually
4 experienced. For example, during the years I was a
5 teacher, at one time I was a junior class sponsor,
6 and the junior class sponsor had a number of
7 additional duties such as putting on an annual
8 school play to raise funds, serving as the -- to
9 being in charge of the concessions at all football
10 and basketball events. So that your time both
11 night and day was devoted to your job, and very
12 little of that was devoted to teaching. It was
13 obvious as you think about it, you know, the
14 profession is not what I expected it to be.

15 This is not what I went to college to do, it
16 is not what I wanted to do. So, Mary and I both
17 became pretty disenchanted with teaching and the
18 lack of input that teachers had into anything that
19 happened to them.

20 When you're caught up in circumstances like
21 we were in the schools there, of course you talk to
22 fellow teachers about it and you try to find out
23 whether or not there's not some interest in putting

1 together a united front to solve some of the
2 problem.

3 Well, there was a great deal of apathy, but
4 in addition to a great deal of apathy on the part
5 of our co-workers -- after all, many of them had
6 been teaching many years and this was just a normal
7 way of life. What's to get excited about? But in
8 addition to that, there was the element of fear,
9 because contracts could be renewed without cause.
10 And so I believe those two factors put together,
11 the apathy and being accustom to the circumstances
12 as they were, plus being afraid to go out on a limb
13 and challenge the authority of the principal or the
14 superintendent or dare to question the actions of
15 the school board, just didn't hit a note at all
16 with your co-workers.

17 So, usually when you at a faculty meeting
18 raised questions trying to get information or
19 trying to change things, you were there all alone.

20 MS. MARY SMITH: One of the examples of
21 united activity that occurred in my school was the
22 exchange or the giving of gifts and providing of a
23 Christmas tree by the teacher in the building. And

1 everyone participated in that activity. It had
2 gotten to be rather expensive. When I came into
3 the system, I suggested that we get together and
4 unitedly not do it any more. And we had a meeting
5 and we agreed to do it. That night the teacher,
6 the president of the Classroom Teachers Association
7 got a call from the superintendent. She called a
8 quick meeting of the faculty the next day in which
9 she cried and said she didn't intend to be bad, and
10 we canceled the whole thing.

11 We continued as long as I taught there with
12 having a Christmas party provided by the teacher,
13 the refreshments, the Christmas tree and gifts to
14 each of the children.

15 Ironically, Texas was one of the cradles of
16 teacher unionism. One of their earliest formations
17 of a union affiliated with the AFL-CIO -- or the
18 AFL was the union formed in San Antonio back in the
19 thirties probably or maybe earlier. The union
20 disappeared when the officers were fired. Remember
21 the law of 30 day contract cancellation, and they
22 were all fired and the union evaporated.

23 Our first exposure to a teacher union was on

1 a visit to Gary in 1957 where my sister and
2 brother-in-law were teachers. And I realized that
3 my sister had a duty-free lunch hour. She had a
4 much higher salary, and she was a member of the
5 American Federation of Teachers. We both got
6 excited about it, and we talked about the values of
7 teacher unionism and the need for such an
8 organization in Texas. At the time we weren't
9 seriously considering moving to Gary, we simply
10 compared the two situations.

11 Then before we left, my sister suggested that
12 we interview the school system, which we did. We
13 did not take a job, we just talked to the personnel
14 officer and went back to Texas to our job.

15 MR. CHARLES SMITH: No, our
16 observations of the school systems in northwest
17 Indiana, in Gary and in Calumet Township and
18 Hammond where they had unions led us to really be
19 concerned that they didn't have comparable
20 organizations in Texas. However, our experience
21 there had been such that teachers were just not
22 willing to form an organization and to take a
23 leading role. They had too much in history of

1 pacivity and, you know, during the years that we
2 taught in Texas, it was just pretty obvious that to
3 try to go back to Ft. Worth and try to interest our
4 co-workers in a union would just be an impossible
5 feat. So, we felt that if we were going to be in a
6 situation where we might have some input into what
7 happened to us as teachers, that we were going to
8 have to leave.

9 Mary and I have always tended to be
10 activists, but there wasn't anything in our
11 background that would lead us toward a union or
12 away from a union. You know, it was just something
13 that wasn't an issue as we were growing up. And in
14 the years that we were in school, we were activists
15 and as such, you know, we had no fear of
16 organizations that took an activist position.

17 So, we weren't in any way anti-union or
18 doubtful about the possible advantage of being
19 affiliated with a national labor organization.

20 MS. MARY SMITH: We came to Gary in
21 1957. At that time the Gary local was a majority
22 local in Gary. It had a long and proud history as
23 a teacher union, and also as a leader in the field

1 of trying to integrate the faculties and move the
2 schools together. It still predominantly
3 segregated in the French sections of Gary, because
4 of the housing patterns, but it had a proud history
5 even in terms of integrated faculties at that time.

6 The Gary union was originally chartered in
7 1916. It faded into oblivion during the dark years
8 of the steel mill strikes and whatnot. It was kept
9 alive by some of the industrial arts teachers, and
10 when it was rechartered in 1937, it had still some
11 of the original charter members there who had
12 maintained their membership through the years.

13 The local became very active in 1938 when it
14 organized to do something about the merit pay
15 system that existed in Gary at that time. And the
16 superintendent who had been the original
17 superintendent of the Gary schools, William
18 A. Wirt, died. His widow said it was the Gary
19 Teachers Union that killed him.

20 The local had become active in the AFT
21 sending delegates to the AFT. Natalie Ousley
22 (phonetic) was a black teacher in Gary who became a
23 vice president of the American Federation of

1 Teachers. It had a black president back in the
2 fifties, local man, Bill Swan who I think perhaps
3 became an officer of the American Federation of
4 Teachers. He ran for the presidency in 1957 or
5 1958. He's dead now. But his wife still lives in
6 Gary, and we still see her occasionally.

7 Even though the Gary local, Local 4, was the
8 predominant organization in Gary, it still -- you
9 still experienced many of the same problems you saw
10 and we saw in Texas. We still had people who were
11 union members who whispered about it. I joined a
12 40 teacher staff that had a very strong anti-union
13 principal who frankly and openly discriminated
14 against union teachers. Therefore, the eleven
15 members of the staff who were union members were
16 secret union members. Most people didn't know that
17 they were union teachers.

18 That changed the year I was there. I became
19 the union building rep and confronted the principal
20 on occasion. And of course, because of the nature
21 of the American Federation of Teachers, he was
22 afraid and he backed down. I had no major problem
23 with him. But when I entered the faculty there

1 were only eleven members and nobody knew who they
2 were. This is again reflective of the elementary
3 school, because this was -- most of the members of
4 the union were in the secondary schools. This is
5 not an objective evaluation of those teachers, but
6 as I look back on it, those eleven teachers were
7 the superior teachers of the staff. They knew what
8 they believed and why they believed it and they
9 were members of the union because they were active
10 members of their profession.

11 MR. CHARLES SMITH: My experience with
12 the union parallels very much Mary's in that, you
13 know, since one of the reasons we were attracted to
14 come to Gary in the first place was the fact that
15 there was a strong teachers organization. We both
16 immediately tried to involve ourselves in the
17 activities of that organization.

18 During my first year as a teacher I was at a
19 unit school, Emerson School which had kindergarten
20 through 12th grade. My assignment was in junior
21 and senior high school where I taught math and
22 science. We did have monthly building meetings in
23 the building and the people who were active in the

1 union were by far the superior teachers on the
2 staff, just a wonderful group of people. I can
3 just name so many of them. And these were lively
4 discussions where when there were problems in the
5 building, the teachers would arrive at a position
6 and our building representative would take it up
7 with the principal, which, you know, took a very
8 active role in the everyday life of the school.

9 I became extremely active and my second year
10 at the school I was elected to be the building
11 representative for the school which was really a
12 challenging and a wonderful experience. Because I
13 did take such an active role at the building level,
14 within a year I was serving as a member of the
15 union executive board and was elected to be the
16 chairman of the membership committee. As a union
17 officer, I continued to play a very active and
18 outspoken role. And in 1962 I was elected to be
19 president of the union.

20 MS. MARY SMITH: Although there was no
21 collective bargaining relationship as such in the
22 union at that time, the Gary Teachers Union, Local
23 4 did enjoy a predominant position in bargaining

1 for salaries, and in some instances working
2 conditions. For example, we did have a duty-free
3 lunch hour for all teachers, K through 12 which was
4 unheard of in Texas for anybody, but in a large
5 part of Indiana for elementary teachers. We did
6 negotiate the salaries, and when we had reached
7 agreement, then it was presented, also, to the
8 Classroom Teachers Association, a rival
9 organization which probably had 150 members.

10 One of the things that was true in Gary at
11 that time that is probably unique, we had to attend
12 an education conference in October. And for that
13 reason, up until 1952, all teachers had to join the
14 association in order to get to be paid for those
15 two days of leave.

16 In 1952 or '3, they got a state Attorney
17 General's ruling that permitted the Gary Teachers
18 Union to have an education conference which
19 teachers could go to. At that time we took partial
20 dues from members in order to give them tickets to
21 the education conference. So, therefore, we had
22 about half of our identified members who never
23 fully paid their dues. We had about, oh, I'd say

1 60 percent of the people or 65 percent of the
2 people, teachers, were officially members but only
3 about half of those finally paid all their dues
4 each year. And so we still were a majority
5 organization, but a minority in actual membership.

6 The organization did participate, as Charles
7 said, in attacking problems in the schools, whether
8 they were elementary or secondary. The elementary
9 teachers were less likely to take a grievance all
10 the way to the top, but they did have the
11 mechanism. They could report to their president
12 and something would be done.

13 One of the things that was true of Local 4 at
14 that time was Anna Malona who had been a president
15 of the Gary Teachers Union and who had taken an
16 early retirement in order to work with the Indiana
17 Federation of Teachers and the local, she got \$50 a
18 month I think from each organization, Local 4 and
19 the state federation. This supplemented her
20 teachers pension and she was on call. This made an
21 extra ability to get some attention to problems
22 that couldn't be handled by the full-time teacher
23 who served as president.

1 Each fall, of course, our active membership
2 drive took place because the education conference
3 was in late October. So, each fall we had a
4 membership drive. I think it would be better for
5 Charles to tell about it, because when he became
6 membership chairman, he each September and October
7 received the membership applications and the
8 partial pays and the money. Sometimes we were up
9 until four o'clock in the morning trying to get the
10 money that we were supposed to have balanced with
11 the money that we actually had. And sometimes we
12 had three or \$4,000 in our home at night or until
13 we could get to the bank to pay those dues. And if
14 you had a teacher, a building rep that made a
15 mistake on his building report where he reported
16 five dollars twice or something, you could stay up
17 all night trying to find that five dollars.

18 But it was exciting, and we were very
19 definitely a part of the organizing program, as he
20 said, the membership chairman, so that we kept the
21 records. And we had a rather cumbersome operation
22 where we noted in a teacher directory all the
23 partial pays and all the sometime pays and all the

1 full members. And we had -- when he inherited the
2 books, they had a color code, used green ink if one
3 thing and blue ink if anything or red ink of
4 another checked off by the teacher's names in the
5 teacher directory. And so it was very cumbersome
6 but very exciting.

7 In 1962 when Charles was elected to the
8 presidency of Local 4, he asked me to serve as
9 chairman of the publicity. This was an executive
10 board position. I think it's a very important
11 position in terms of close working relationship
12 with the president. I think that a publicity
13 chairman cannot go off on a wild tangent of Gary
14 Teacher which was the official newspaper
15 organization of the local. I am a veteran at
16 purple pros which was always blue penciled out of
17 existence.

18 Many a Gary Teacher never made it to the
19 press because the president took care of it, which
20 I think was another reason why I was named as the
21 publicity chairman, because we did have a close
22 relationship as team workers and co-workers in an
23 organization that we both loved. Therefore, when

1 he said that can't go, I readily agreed and
2 frequently wrote it knowing that it was going to be
3 blue penciled out of existence. But the Gary
4 Teacher came out once a month and it was done in
5 the union office with a half-time secretary. I was
6 looking at some old Gary Teachers yesterday that
7 came out during that year. The secretary was a
8 teacher on maternity leave. She didn't know
9 anything about secretarial work.

10 So, frequently the work was done in the
11 office and then Charles brought it home for me to
12 redo that night at home because of the nature of
13 the work of the typing and work. But it was our
14 job to get the Gary Teacher out once a month. Went
15 out at the building rep meetings. Of course, the
16 news releases that went out were, let's face it,
17 they were written by Charles and signed by Charles
18 because I would never have gotten anything out that
19 didn't go with the full approval of the president.

20 Charles was a full-time teacher during those
21 years. And so the work of the union was done by
22 volunteers after school. It was time consuming.
23 You found the idealist in the teachers union who

1 wanted to make changes who believed in their
2 profession, who wanted to do something to turn it
3 into a true profession, and therefore, they were
4 willing to spend the midnight hours to do the
5 things that needed to be done.

6 Now, then, on the business of organizing
7 teachers and going to teachers to say to them that
8 they need to be a member of the union, I think a
9 lot of that was done by example. When I first came
10 into the system, the teachers in the little
11 elementary school where I taught would not talk
12 about the union unless they had a very close little
13 close knit group where they could get off into the
14 teachers lounge and talk in whispers.

15 MS. MARY SMITH: Publicity, going back
16 to the subject of publicity for the union, I like
17 to think of the relationship we had with the local
18 news media, the radio station. We knew personally
19 the announcer that did the news on the local radio,
20 WWCA, and also the Post Tribune which was the only
21 daily newspaper in Gary. The school newsperson
22 that was assigned to school news was invited to our
23 home on numerous occasions for dinner, for after

1 school board, drinks, so that we knew him well.

2 I know the maddest he ever got to express
3 himself to us was I commended him once on the
4 coverage of a school story saying that he had done
5 a good job. And he thought that I was implying
6 that he had slanted it in our favor. He let me
7 know right quick that he had done a very objective
8 job of reporting. But we did, both of us,
9 associate with the news media people so that we did
10 have a first name relationship with them, and we
11 tried to talk to them as far as our perspective was
12 concerned, over a drink or over dinner so that they
13 knew us and they knew where we were coming from.
14 And therefore, even though they might have printed
15 a news story that wasn't as we wanted, at least
16 they knew where we were coming from because we did
17 associate with them outside the regular reporting
18 of the news, school board meeting or whatever.

19 The publicity committee as such was really
20 the executive board of the union in developing a
21 plan of action. The community, I think, was --
22 even though it was an industrial community
23 dominated by labor unions, the community as a whole

1 probably were just like any other community in that
2 they were fearful of increased taxes, they were
3 fearful of union power in the schools as far as it
4 having some impact on their purses.

5 I think generally speaking, if you asked a
6 union father or mother about their position toward
7 the Gary Teachers Union, there would have been --
8 it would have been friendly, but I don't think that
9 they were automatically supportive of the Gary
10 Teachers Union. I think that the support we got
11 for the Gary Teachers Union was largely developed
12 after Charles became president when he became so
13 willingly involved in all aspects of the community.

14 For example, in the early sixties right after
15 he became president, there was an open housing
16 ordinance that was being presented to the city
17 council that would have opened up Gary housing
18 patterns, and the Gary Teachers Union was up front
19 in support of that housing ordinance. And it
20 wasn't easy. Charles was called to two of the high
21 schools to defend his position for taking a
22 leadership role in that. And they tried first to
23 tell him that he had done it without approval from

1 the executive board, which was not true. But he
2 was called to two different high school meetings to
3 defend the position of the Gary Teachers Union in
4 support of that open housing ordinance.

5 There was an article in the Gary Teacher in
6 support of the ordinance and saying that as long as
7 one of our teachers couldn't live where he wanted
8 to live, all of our teachers couldn't live where
9 they wanted to live. In other words, we felt that
10 it was a very important aspect of teachers as well
11 as children to grow up in an integrated society and
12 be permitted to live wherever he wanted to live.

13 Charles, I think, was unique in the operation
14 of any local in the operation of Local 4. I think
15 that the involvement on a city-wide basis was
16 unique to his administration. I think that prior
17 to his administration, the Gary Teachers Union
18 tended to be bread and butter oriented. We talked
19 about the need for improved salaries because it
20 would attract and keep better teachers, but we
21 didn't get involved in the community as such. And
22 I don't think that the Gary Teachers Union does now
23 either.

1 I think that his involvement with labor, with
2 social workers -- I know of one instance where he
3 participated -- or we participated, a large number
4 of our teachers, in a march down Broadway for
5 trying to get something done about welfare reform.
6 The governor of the state was coming to Gary, and
7 there had been a great deal of work on his part to
8 cut back welfare support for the people on welfare
9 in the area, I guess across the state, but in Gary.
10 Governor Whitcomb probably in the late sixties in
11 which he was coming to Gary, so we organized a
12 march with the Welfare Reform Coalition of the city
13 and area and we were going to march on his dinner.
14 It turned out he got word we were coming and he
15 didn't show up.

16 But it created considerable activity on the
17 part of the local media and the community because
18 of our involvement. I know I was pushed down the
19 steps by one of the good Republicans, but we did
20 organize in those kinds of situations where we were
21 down in support of the welfare workers' strike when
22 they went on strike and they lost their jobs.

23 So, Gary, even though it is a labor

1 community, doesn't necessarily have the proudest of
2 history in support of public employees unions and
3 their activities.

4 But throughout his years, he was active in
5 the promoting of anything that happened in Gary in
6 terms of social reform or raising money for social
7 projects or participating in -- I know another time
8 a large number of teachers marched down Broadway in
9 support again of following the Washington march in
10 '64. Right after that they marched -- we had our
11 own civil rights parade in which the Gary Teachers
12 Union was visibly present with their signs "Gary
13 Teachers Union supports civil rights."

14 We had civil rights workshops long before
15 they became popular in the AFT. And we attempted
16 in our first contract in 1968 to provide for
17 voluntary integration of staffs in the schools.
18 Therefore, we never had any judge's ruling in Gary
19 of integrating staffs or trying to do something
20 about integration of the schools, because we had in
21 advance tried to deal with the problem by -- I know
22 one year we had summer school, you could only teach
23 in summer school if you were a different race from

1 the predominant race in the school. So that a
2 large number of efforts were made to voluntarily
3 integrate the entire staffs. And the integration
4 of the staff and the schools took place without any
5 big demonstrations in Gary.

6 Now, there was a demonstration in '52 when
7 they integrated one of the inner city high schools
8 but this was before we came. I believe it was
9 1952. Frank Sinatra came to Gary to try to smooth
10 the situation. There was a strike of the students,
11 they were no longer going to that school. But this
12 all happened before we came to Gary. And we had no
13 racial, no big racial strife or incidents in Gary
14 during the years that Charles was president.

15 The students strike of 1952 was a students
16 strike in opposition to the integration of ^{Froebel} Rables
17 School (phonetic) when children, black children
18 were first admitted to ^{Froebel} Rables School which was a
19 school on 15th Avenue in Gary, an inner city
20 school.

21 I suppose it's hard to ever realize or
22 understand why you do certain things or when you
23 adopt certain positions. I know that I came to

1 Gary with some strong feelings that had resulted in
2 my growing up in Texas that I perhaps -- once I had
3 to ride from Ft. Worth to Austin which is about 150
4 miles when I was riding with some black co-workers
5 at the YWCA, and I had to ride all that distance
6 without stopping because there was no washroom
7 available to both blacks and whites. You don't
8 think of those things. But it was very basic to
9 me.

10 You know, this happened in Texas and I was
11 very concerned about it. Another time when I was
12 riding on a Ft. Worth bus, I was shoved down by a
13 black woman who had to move to the back of the bus.
14 I was at first angry, and then I realized that she
15 wouldn't have had any reason to shove me down
16 except for the fact that she had to move from the
17 front of a crowded bus to the back of a crowded
18 bus, simply because she was black.

19 So, those things had had impact on me before
20 I came to Gary. So that I came with some strong
21 feelings about what should be, and it was shocking
22 to go into a hardware store and be waited on by a
23 black clerk. This had never happened to me before.

1 And I applauded it and approved it.

2 So many of the things you do when you work
3 for an organization and become an activist or a
4 mover or whatever, you have a basic belief that
5 this is the way it should be and you don't really
6 know when you adopted that belief or when you
7 became concerned. But I think one of the things
8 that characterized the Charles Smith
9 administration, and I think, of course, that I
10 considered myself a moving part of that
11 administration not just because I was his wife, but
12 because I believed in the things we were doing, is
13 that any time you go for something, you justify it
14 in terms of long-term philosophy, whether you say
15 it or not. You talk about the need for small
16 classes and then you're not really talking about
17 the need for small classes for you, but you're
18 talking about the need for small classes because
19 you can do a better job as a teacher.

20 Or if you talk about the need for an
21 integrated class, you're not talking about an
22 integrated class in terms of what it will do for
23 you, but you're talking about it in terms of the

1 necessity to have an integrated education for our
2 people so that the cultures are mingled and there's
3 an understanding between the two cultures or the
4 three cultures. And I think this is important and
5 I don't think that maybe you understand why that is
6 when you do it except for the fact that you are
7 concerned and you do feel it's right. And
8 therefore, you do it.

9 And sometimes, you know, I -- my sister went
10 to Washington, D.C. in 1964 to the march on
11 Washington. I felt like as I came back and was
12 marching down Broadway with my friends and my foes
13 watching me marching down Broadway, that it took a
14 great deal more courage to do that than it did to
15 go to Washington, D.C. And those kinds of things,
16 you're doing right where you live because you
17 believe in it.

18 MR. CHARLES SMITH: I was active in the
19 union because I felt like that teachers really
20 needed a union. As I participated in union
21 activities, it seemed to me that there were a lot
22 of areas in which the union could be a more
23 effective instrument, not only for teachers, but

1 also a force in the community that I didn't see
2 exhibited by Local 4. That's not to say that we
3 didn't have fine, wonderful people in the people
4 that served on the union executive board in
5 positions of union leadership, wonderful, fine
6 leaders. I felt like, however, that number one, we
7 needed a more formal collective bargaining
8 relationship with the board, that as a
9 representative of teachers, there ought to be
10 spelled out in much clearer detail just how the
11 teachers union was going to impact on the
12 decision-making process. In addition to that,
13 there was a very real reluctance on the part of the
14 union at that time to take positions and to get
15 involved in activities unless they were directly
16 school related.

17 There's a very direct relationship as
18 teachers and as educators with many, many community
19 activities. That if we're concerned about
20 teaching, if we're concerned about the school, if
21 we're concerned about education, then obviously we
22 have to have a level of concern that goes beyond
23 that, because we have to consider the people who

1 are coming to schools to be educated. That means
2 that as a teachers union, that we have to consider
3 the well-being of the students, their families and
4 the communities in which they are going to grow up.

5 Beyond that I think that teachers unions have
6 a special responsibility to the rest of society.
7 We are teachers, and I think we ought to show to
8 other people of the labor movement and of the
9 community, that there are changes that are
10 necessary if we're going to realize the potential
11 of the American dream.

12 So that I feel very strongly that as teachers
13 and as teacher unionists, that we have really a
14 special responsibility in that area that many times
15 it's going to be necessary for us to take the lead
16 in making for a better society. That's a view that
17 is shared by many people in the AFT and was true at
18 the time. However, you know, there's a large
19 element, particularly among the leadership in the
20 Midwest, that the teachers union pretty much ought
21 to stick to the business of the schools and teacher
22 welfare and teacher salaries.

23 But there was in addition to that a strong

1 progressive element that felt like that there were
2 changes that need to be made in society and that it
3 was a proper role and function of unions to take
4 part in those activities. And of course, that's
5 the school of thought that I fell within. That's
6 one of the reasons that I aspired to and took a
7 position of leadership in our local union. Number
8 one, I was dissatisfied with our relationship with
9 the school board, and felt like that we could
10 organize ourselves in a way to be more effective in
11 representing the particular interests of teachers,
12 but also, I saw and felt that the union ought to
13 exercise a greater role within the labor movement
14 itself, and also in the larger community as well.

15 In order to accomplish changes and to make
16 the union more effective, one of the things that I
17 felt like was necessary for our union to do was to
18 broaden the base of teacher participation in our
19 activities. That is not to say that we didn't have
20 teacher participation, but I felt like that the
21 decision-making process ought to be as broad and
22 extended as it possibly could.

23 So, as a consequence of that, during the

1 years that I was president of the local, that would
2 be from 1962 up until 1971, union meetings, mail
3 referenda, building representatives meetings,
4 informational meetings in various parts of the
5 system were methods that we used to try to broaden
6 and have the widest possible participation in the
7 decision-making of the union.

8 Early on in my presidency, we tackled first
9 that of teacher representation. I hadn't been in
10 the presidency very long until we came to the real
11 point of confrontation with our school board in
12 terms of who's going to represent teachers and how
13 are they going to represent them. In 1963 we had a
14 one-day strike and that was a single issue, and
15 that is of the right of the union to represent
16 teachers in negotiations with the board.

17 We had some very dramatic minutes, and we
18 came in with a six point proposal to the Board of
19 Education. Before we adjourned the meeting with
20 the school board, we had won all six points. From
21 that point on, we had a rather clear cut line that
22 we could use in approaching the board in
23 negotiations for teachers.

1 So, one of my first objectives in becoming
2 president of the union was met fairly early on in
3 1963. It wasn't until 1967, however, that we
4 finally got the board to agree even though we had
5 no state legislation that authorized it, to a
6 collective bargaining election. And in 1967 in a
7 very lopsided vote, the union was selected by the
8 teachers to be the exclusive bargaining agent, and
9 our first collective bargaining agreement, formal
10 signed agreement was signed in 1968.

11 In the area during those years in which we
12 tried to extend the influence of the union in the
13 labor union was our active participation in the
14 labor movement itself. In our county there has
15 been an active central labor union, and as
16 participating member in that, we were entitled to
17 send representatives to it. We saw to it that we
18 had regular representation at central labor union
19 meetings, and that our representatives were very
20 much a part of the activities of the central labor
21 union.

22 If there were positions that we felt like
23 that it was important that the central labor union

1 take, we went in and very effectively lobbied for
2 the positions that we wanted the central labor
3 union to take. Among those activities, of course,
4 were in the area of political endorsements. And
5 one of the things we tried to do was maximize the
6 input, the effect of labor's support for endorsed
7 candidates.

8 We were mainly concerned with the politics of
9 the legislature, and of course the politics of
10 Congress as we were affected by them. So that our
11 efforts in the central labor union were trying to
12 get a unified support for candidates who favored
13 the kind of positions that we favored, especially
14 in the area of schools. We lobbied for state
15 legislators, state representatives and senators,
16 and also worked in the Congressional races to get
17 the best possible candidates for Congress.

18 Lake County where Gary is located is a labor
19 community, and the central labor union was, you
20 know, relatively active. Of course, there were
21 people in the labor movement that weren't quite
22 willing to accept public employee unions. In fact,
23 one of the members of our board of school trustees

1 who was also an employee of one of the big steel
2 union had trouble accepting us as a real union.
3 But it was really after our strike in 1963 that
4 they felt like, well, here is a group of people
5 that believe in using the same strong tactics given
6 a problem situation as we do.

7 So, from that point on, I think there was a
8 great deal more of acceptance and appreciation for
9 the teachers and the teachers union. So that when
10 we tried to work with them, and of course, you
11 know, we tried to work with them in an active,
12 positive way. As a result of that we had teachers
13 run for office in the central labor union and had
14 spokesman who got up and -- spokespersons who got
15 up and talked at the central labor union meeting so
16 that we established a real good rapport with the
17 leadership of the central labor union.

18 The AFT as a national organization and AFT
19 locals generally had trouble many, many years for
20 coming to grips with the question about whether or
21 not it might not be professional for teachers to
22 strike. In the history of our local, preceding my
23 accepting the presidency, there had been at times

1 when there really was a severe problem, discussion
2 about would it be appropriate or would it be proper
3 for the union to take such an active position as to
4 vote to go on strike. They had never taken such a
5 role, but the idea wasn't foreign to the teachers
6 in Gary.

7 At the time of our 1963 strike which is the
8 first strike in the history of the local, the issue
9 was clear cut. And as we went out and met with the
10 teachers and described the problems that we were
11 confronting with the school board and the refusal
12 of the school board to enter into any kind of
13 meaningful talks, there came to be a real general
14 acceptance that this is one of those extreme
15 situations in which it appears that nothing else is
16 appropriate.

17 So, the consequence of that, even though the
18 day before the strike was to begin, I spent all
19 night pacing the floor about wondering how closely
20 the teachers honoring the picket line would
21 coincide with the vote, the overwhelming vote to
22 strike that we had had. And as it resulted, the
23 number of people that were on the picket line was a

1 tremendous surprise to me, because almost totally
2 the teachers honored the picket lines, even though
3 many of them were not members of the union at that
4 time.

5 Even though the AFT itself had been
6 ambivalent toward the idea of a strike, we never
7 had any doubt that we would have the support of the
8 national organization. We were fortunate at the
9 time in that the national office was in Chicago and
10 we were in frequent contact with President Carl
11 Megel and the other members of that small, small
12 AFT staff at that time. They in every possible way
13 indicated support, and on the day of the strike
14 itself, Carl Megel, president of the AFT, came to
15 Gary and we were very pleased to see that level of
16 support from the national AFT even though the AFT
17 itself had serious questions about the use of the
18 strike as a tactic.

19 The national AFT through its officers was
20 very supportive of our strike. Of course, we had
21 kept them fully informed of the problems we were
22 having and the very strong potential for a strike.
23 In addition to that, through our central labor

1 union ties, we had alerted them to the fact that
2 there was an upcoming strike and asked for their
3 support.

4 Of course, we didn't have any other union
5 employees that would be directly affected, but we
6 did get a pledge of support from the central labor
7 union. In addition to that, we asked for outside
8 help from the state labor department. Of course,
9 there's nothing under Indiana law that would permit
10 them to intervene directly in any kind of a labor
11 dispute involving teachers in Indiana. However,
12 the State Commissioner of Labor came to Gary and
13 talked directly to the school board and tried to
14 use the influence of his office which is all he
15 could do to reach a settlement with the teachers.

16 Because of the nature of the strike and its
17 support on the part of so many of the teachers, we
18 didn't have to call on the national AFT for
19 financial assistance or staff assistance. That had
20 been pretty largely true of our whole organizing
21 effort in Gary. The local early on became well
22 enough organized by itself, had a very effective
23 building reps organization and very effective

1 leadership so that it in effect organized itself
2 without any kind of outside help.

3 Of course, Gary probably, though it may not
4 be unique, had a very favorable atmosphere for
5 union organizing to take place, because the
6 acceptance of the union was so widespread and so
7 many people in the community were members of the
8 union themselves or members of the family were
9 members of the union. So that you didn't have
10 outright hostility on the part of large segments of
11 the community simply because you were union.

12 MS. MARY SMITH: The strike of 1963 I
13 recall as being a highly emotional situation in
14 which I was involved in an action that was new
15 ground. I was not convinced that it was going to
16 be successful, because I still felt that teachers
17 were far too conservative to participate, and yet
18 on the day of the strike we learned that I think as
19 I don't remember, but I think there were eight
20 people who actually crossed the picket line and
21 went into the building.

22 When I think about the role of the AFT as a
23 part of that strike, the AFT was supportive in

1 terms of having the president down to visit us in
2 terms of encouraging us to stand up and be heard.
3 But there's another point of view there, too, and
4 that is that we felt in our parent organization
5 that we had an organization that subscribed to our
6 beliefs that teachers were, indeed, professional
7 and would not be truly professional until they
8 became a part of the decision-making process of
9 their profession.

10 So, that was very important to me and I felt
11 like that was the issue of the strike. We didn't
12 have any money on the table. There was no money,
13 no increase in salary involved in that strike. It
14 was strictly a matter of teachers being a part of
15 their profession in the decision-making processes,
16 and we felt that in our parent organization, the
17 AFT, was the national organization, a supportive
18 organization that shared our concerns and our
19 goals.

20 In saying that we were pioneers, we weren't
21 just pioneers in Gary or pioneers in the AFT, but
22 we were pioneers for the teacher movement
23 throughout the state, the United States, and we

1 knew or felt strongly that what we did and the
2 success of what we were doing would change the face
3 of teachers all over the United States. And we
4 felt that the AFT was the force that could do that.

5 (END OF TAPE 1)

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1 (TAPE 2, MARCH 18, 1987)

2 MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene
3 Epstein. My interview with Charles and Mary Smith
4 is continuing on March 18th, 1987 in Chicago.

5 MS. MARY SMITH: In 1960, Charles
6 attended his first convention of the AFT as a
7 delegate from Local 4. I didn't go down to the
8 convention until Thursday which when the convention
9 was pretty well over. But there was lots of
10 excitement and lots of talk among the delegates as
11 I got there because there had been a very heated
12 election.

13 Carl Megel was running against Myron
14 Lieberman in the election. And it had been
15 generally agreed that something needed to be done
16 about the Classroom Teachers Caucus to give it a
17 new image, one that is apparently being less
18 conservative and more involved in the national AFT.
19 So, they agreed to rename the caucus and call it
20 the National Caucus, and they were going to get
21 together between conventions and try to get it
22 organized.

23 I don't know when after that, but probably in

1 late November of that year, they met in Toledo and
2 reorganized the caucus and made plans for the 1962
3 convention, which took place in Detroit. But the
4 '61 convention was in Philadelphia and was between
5 elections. And I remember going to the
6 Philadelphia convention not as a delegate. I had
7 plans of seeing the Liberty Bell, it was my first
8 trip to Philadelphia, and we had our daughter who
9 was 15 or 16, I guess.

10 So, we were really going to see Philadelphia.
11 And every time we turned around, Charles wasn't
12 there. He was at a caucus meeting. There was a
13 mimeograph machine and typewriter in one of the
14 caucus suites, and it was going all the time. It
15 seemed to me that Charles was the only one that was
16 running it. He was very much involved, and I would
17 have a date with him to see the Liberty Bell and
18 Charles didn't show up, or I had a date with him to
19 go to a play, and Charles didn't show up. He was
20 in the caucus room running off literature and
21 helping to make decisions. That was my last
22 convention as a non-delegate. After that I joined
23 the club so that I could see my husband at a

1 convention. By the end of that convention I wasn't
2 speaking to him.

3 I saw the National Caucus as I saw
4 everything, as how it coincided with my beliefs.
5 Of course, we were automatically attached to that
6 caucus because we were from Gary. But in addition
7 to that, I didn't see that much difference between
8 the Progressive Caucus and the National Caucus. I
9 was usually a little bit outraged when I heard
10 people say that we were conservative in that we
11 didn't believe in proper social issues, and we
12 didn't believe in anything that had to do with
13 international relations. We were strictly
14 provincial and concerned only about teachers and
15 their salaries and working conditions. I didn't
16 believe that because I knew I wasn't that. So, I
17 was not disturbed by being a member of a caucus,
18 but I was disturbed about the reputation that my
19 caucus seemed to have.

20 When I went to my first convention session, I
21 guess in 1962, I was tremendously impressed at the
22 caliber of the leadership of the American
23 Federation of Teachers. The meetings were orderly

1 but heated. The spokespersons were eloquent and
2 knowledgeable about parliamentary procedure. Even
3 though the convention floor was heated, the
4 discussions became very outraged or whatever, and
5 very convincing. They were very orderly. And the
6 people who spoke seemed to know what they were
7 talking about and be very convincing.

8 Herrick Roth was among the speakers that was
9 frequently seen. Rebecca Simonson, James O'Mara,
10 John Fukes didn't speak as much as some of the
11 others. Mary Ellen Rierdon was an outstanding
12 person. And it was exciting and enlightening and
13 you felt like you were really a part of it. We
14 didn't know Carl as the president of the American
15 Federation of Teachers when he first became
16 president, and I'm sure he learned a lot. They
17 tell the story of his telling an AFT group that
18 they would adjourn to the carousal room. I
19 couldn't believe it, because it didn't sound like
20 the Carl Megel I knew. But he did grow with the
21 years.

22 Carl had a lot of qualities that made him
23 effective. One of them was his determination to

1 remember things, to remember people, to know
2 people. You could see people that he had met once
3 and he knew them. At a later time he told us that
4 that was no accident, it wasn't a natural thing, it
5 was something that he cultivated. You'd see him --
6 later on I would see him write people's names down
7 so that he could call them by name a few minutes
8 later and know something about them.

9 When we knew him, he was a very effective
10 president. He followed Robert's Rules, he knew
11 Robert's Rules and he ran a solid meeting very
12 effectively.

13 You know, when you look back on the good old
14 days, you always remember it from your perspective.
15 What may have been good then, you know, wouldn't be
16 good now. And what would look like successful then
17 may not have been as successful as you thought it
18 was. I thought that Carl Megel ran a good
19 organization. I recognized the fact that he was
20 the end of an era. It was during his last term of
21 office that the AFT reached the figure of a hundred
22 thousand members.

23 From then on it was a big organization and it

1 was going to operate differently. And you realize
2 that when Charlie Cogan came into office, he was
3 the -- the National Caucus was in shambles. It
4 really no longer existed. So, he came into a new
5 era. He came into a divided AFT but no longer a
6 small organization. It was a huge organization
7 subject to all of the kinds of things that happened
8 to a huge organization.

9 Now, Charlie having come from the New York
10 local, I would have thought would have been very
11 astute on running a meeting, but his meetings were
12 very loosely run.

13 I didn't feel that the convention meetings
14 were as successful, not because he wasn't trying to
15 do a good job, but somehow or other he wasn't able
16 to control the people that perhaps Carl had been
17 able to control in that the meetings were not run
18 necessarily according to Robert's Rules. They got
19 kind of wild sometimes.

20 It was somewhat surprising to me to see
21 Charlie as weak on the convention floor, because I
22 had had experience two years with him as the
23 chairman of the Resolutions Committee which was one

1 very busy and active committee that dealt with a
2 lot of important resolutions. And he ran a very
3 tight ship on those meetings. We followed Robert's
4 Rules and we got the business done and everybody
5 had a feeling that they had had their say on the
6 committee and we were excited when we came out of
7 those Resolutions Committees with the work we had
8 done.

9 I expected the same of him when he became the
10 national president. And after he became the
11 national president, again I think it was probably
12 because of size that a lot of the people that had
13 been permitted to talk on the convention floor
14 earlier suddenly came under the rules of their
15 caucus or whatever, so that the caucus system was
16 not working at the same level it had worked before.

17 Part of the penalties for being big is that
18 you have to take the knocks as well. Gary Teachers
19 Union was the big local in the state, and they were
20 heartily and bitterly resented sometime down state
21 because they seemed to have it all in numbers,
22 votes, whatever, and they were doing such wonderful
23 things that other parts of the state resented them.

1 I think the same was true with New York and
2 the rest of the AFT. Somehow or other we felt
3 helpless. We felt like that our decisions would
4 not be necessarily the decisions that were voted
5 in, because we didn't have the votes. But that's a
6 part of the penalty of being big. You have to take
7 the knocks with the good things.

8 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Just as I
9 immediately became a union member when I came to
10 Gary, and just as I began to involve myself in the
11 affairs of the local because I felt like that there
12 was potential there that was not being realized, so
13 I also approached my activities within the AFT.
14 Within a couple of years of having come to Gary, I
15 was elected to an AFT convention delegate, and I
16 was not content as a delegate to be a delegate who
17 just sat and voted and went away and forgot about
18 it. I immediately got involved in the activities
19 of the caucus.

20 At that time there were two caucuses that
21 were relatively evenly divided. The way the caucus
22 system operated, there were a group of locals that
23 constituted themselves into a group and another

1 group of locals that constituted another caucus.
2 Each of them took positions on questions that were
3 going to come before the convention. And each of
4 them sponsored candidates for AFT office including
5 the office of president and also members of the AFT
6 Executive Council. At the time I got involved, it
7 was fairly evenly divided and the caucus, each
8 caucus had representation on the AFT national
9 council.

10 My local was a member of the then Classroom
11 Teachers Caucus, and I got very actively involved
12 in the affairs of the caucus. It was in one of
13 those very early conventions after I came on board
14 that the decision was made that somehow the
15 Classroom Teachers Caucus which had the image of
16 being somewhat conservative should begin to reshape
17 its image. And my having come from a local that
18 had shown a new level of militancy, I was accepted
19 as someone who could help them achieve a new
20 identity. So, we changed the name of the caucus to
21 the National Caucus, and in that process we tried
22 to give it broader appeal and take on the stance of
23 a more militant wing of the AFT.

1 I became the candidate of that caucus in the
2 office for president of the AFT in 1964, running
3 against the candidate that was presented by the
4 Progressive Caucus, Charlie Cogan. The convention
5 was held in Chicago at the Pick Congress Hotel, and
6 there was a lot of politicking and a lot of
7 campaigning, and it turned out to be a very close
8 election that Charlie won by about 30 votes. So
9 that the National Caucus, the new National Caucus
10 at its very first venture in running a candidate
11 for president, was not successful.

12 I continued, however, active in the affairs
13 of the caucus. In the subsequent convention again
14 we put up a slate of candidates, and John Fukes who
15 had been a president of the AFT, was again the
16 candidate for the caucus. I ran for a position on
17 the AFT Executive Council to be one of the vice
18 presidents. Well, in that election, history had
19 really moved along and the AFT had grown by leaps
20 and bounds, most of that growth coming from New
21 York in the local that had achieved collective
22 bargaining just a few years before.

23 As a result of the changing makeup of the

1 AFT, the National Caucus was really a non-force in
2 that 1966 convention, and has been subsequently to
3 that. I'm not even sure that there is a National
4 Caucus today.

5 The election in 1964 when I was a candidate,
6 it is kind of interesting, because I think really
7 at that point in the history of the AFT that it had
8 really reached a watershed, that the growing tide
9 of militancy had overtaken the AFT. I'm not
10 certain that any of us led in that, but at the time
11 of the election the platform on which Charlie Cogan
12 ran and the platform on which I ran were remarkably
13 similar. I put out a main piece of campaign
14 literature talking about responsibility and
15 militancy.

16 And if there was anything that brought us
17 together, was that same theme, because that was the
18 theme of the Progressive Caucus campaign as well.
19 So that when it came right down to it, the
20 ideological and political differences between
21 Charlie and me were very minimal. He had trouble
22 identifying issues that we didn't agree on just as
23 I had trouble identifying issues. It was the last

1 remnant, really, of the regional politics of the
2 time.

3 I think that no matter what had happened as a
4 result of the election in 1964, I really believe at
5 this time in history, some 30 years later, 25 years
6 later, that the course of the AFT would probably
7 have been remarkably similar. I think we were at a
8 point in time in which teachers more and more
9 wanted an activist kind of organization. I think
10 had I been elected president and the kind of
11 policies that have been pursued in the interim
12 would be very much coincidental.

13 So that I really have the feeling that was
14 the turning point and I'm not certain that I as a
15 leader or Charlie Cogan as a leader or David Seldon
16 or Al Shanker as a leader in that sense really led.
17 I think the trend of the times and the mood of
18 teachers and the mood of the country was such that
19 the AFT was going to have to turn in a more
20 positive, activist, militant direction than they
21 had been able to carry out in the years preceding
22 that.

23 Up until the early sixties, my own experience

1 you know, I worked actively after I became active
2 in the local at the state level. I can recall the
3 difficulties that we had in talking to other
4 teachers and moving them toward a more militant
5 position and the willingness to form a union or to
6 become a union member. I've had many long
7 conversations with Carl Megel when he at one time,
8 he and Howard Hersey were the only organizers that
9 the AFT had. I've heard them describe the kind of
10 reception that they would get when they would talk
11 to a group of teachers where there was no union.

12 There wasn't a mood that lent itself to
13 teachers' active participation. I think that the
14 organizing work that was done during those years
15 was productive. Some people became interested and
16 formed unions but it was a slow, almost one-on-one
17 personal relationship that caused new locals to be
18 established. As a matter of fact, old locals would
19 go out of existence as fast as new ones were
20 chartered. But for whatever set of reasons, that
21 had pretty well changed by the early sixties.

22 I think that teachers everywhere were
23 beginning to sense a greater sense of hopelessness

1 and the need for effective organization than they
2 ever had up to that point. So, I think that some
3 of the growth of the AFT in the intervening years
4 happened because teachers were looking for
5 something that they had not ever had before.

6 I talked at some length about the politics
7 and the mood of teachers in the early sixties. And
8 of course, all of that was such that I continued to
9 maintain an active interest in the national AFT,
10 and continued to involve myself in the national AFT
11 politics.

12 In 1968 I was elected to serve on the AFT
13 Executive Council. And one of the responsibilities
14 that I undertook, at that time David Seldon had
15 been elected to replace Charlie Cogan who retired.
16 My assignment as an AFT vice president was to the
17 Civil Rights Committee, and very much involved
18 myself in the civil rights activities of the
19 national organization.

20 MS. MARY SMITH: As a result of the
21 Ocean Hill/Brownsville strike in 1968, we saw new
22 voices and heard new arguments that sometime we
23 found in conflict with our own personal beliefs.

1 When Dick Parish came to a convention and was
2 speaking in defense of his role in Ocean
3 Hill/Brownsville as a black person, I was torn as a
4 unionist to union discipline and was uncomfortable
5 with any kind of an evaluation I'd make of his
6 role. While I totally sympathized with the
7 position he was in, not ever having been black, I
8 couldn't identify with it fully because I don't
9 have his experience background. But I was very
10 uncomfortable to be opposed to him, at the same
11 time very uncomfortable with not supporting a role
12 of union unity and standing behind the decision of
13 the majority.

14 I think that that strike probably did as much
15 to split up the perception of the AFT in terms of
16 its race relations as any single thing that
17 happened in those years or in any year since. And
18 you had people that didn't know anything about the
19 AFT taking issue with Al Shanker and his role as
20 being totally unthinking when they didn't really
21 know anything about it other than what they had
22 read in the papers and they felt like he was wrong.

23 I don't know, but I know that we had

1 bitterness in the AFT and breakoffs in the AFT
2 following that that were, I think, many times were
3 totally emotional rather than objective and
4 reasonable.

5 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Mary has just
6 alluded to problems that the AFT had to confront
7 during the time that I was active as a member of
8 the AFT executive board. The whole position of the
9 union as it related to the question of quotas to
10 achieve integration versus affirmative action
11 programs, the debate and the differences of opinion
12 that occurred at that time in the late sixties are
13 still divisive in the AFT today. My position at
14 that time was and is that the AFT ought to be
15 opposed to a quota system.

16 We've seen how the quota system historically
17 has so adversely impacted other groups, minorities,
18 that you can't in conscience accept the notion of
19 quotas. However, I think the opinion that I have
20 and the one that I think is most held by people
21 within the AFT is that we should support strong
22 affirmative action programs, not programs just on
23 paper but programs designed to actually work so

1 effectively and so actively that you achieve
2 something that approaches a quota system, and
3 that's the way that real affirmative action
4 programs ought to be designed. They ought to be so
5 affirmative and so much action involved that in
6 cases where there have been clear discrimination,
7 that the effect of that discrimination can
8 eventually be erased and evaporated.

9 I came on the AFT Executive Council the same
10 time that David Seldon was elected to be president
11 of the AFT. David was different from both Charlie
12 Cogan and from Carl Megel, the two other presidents
13 that I had known, in that David was the great
14 innovator and the idea man. Nobody that I have met
15 in the AFT then or since had a greater grasp of how
16 to organize people and how to make unions effective
17 and come up with new ideas and innovative ways to
18 do that as Dave has had.

19 It may be that that was one of Dave's
20 greatest faults, is that many times, good as his
21 ideas were, that he had too many to be implemented
22 at one time. So that to a large extent, come up
23 with a good idea, that idea is lost before it

1 begins because we didn't have the resources to
2 carry out all those ideas at the same time.

3 MS. MARY SMITH: When I think of Dave
4 Seldon, I think of somebody that was warm and that
5 when I got to know him, he was a little different
6 from what I had visualized him as a person that was
7 out there so-called pulling the strings of Charlie
8 Cogan, and that Charlie was waiting to find out
9 what they wanted him to do before he did it. This
10 was the impression that a lot of folks had. And
11 since I knew neither of them very well, I tended to
12 accept it.

13 After I got to know Dave, I realized that he
14 was a very pragmatic person, very willing to try
15 anything if he thought it would work; and that he
16 did listen to his staff; and that he did listen to
17 the Executive Council; and that I think a lot of
18 his effectiveness as a president was sometime
19 watered down because it was Al Shanker looking over
20 his shoulder. Al Shanker was the one with the
21 power, and there were only so many directions that
22 Dave could go before he would be reined in by Al
23 and the strong supporters of Al.

1 Therefore, I think some of the ideas that
2 Dave had didn't work simply because he didn't have
3 the horses on the Executive Council to pursue it.
4 It might have been because he went in a dozen
5 different directions, but I think some of those
6 directions were beyond his control. I don't know,
7 Dave did sometimes tend to be flip when he
8 presented an idea, and it didn't wash, he would
9 abandon and go on to something else. But I think
10 that Dave was very thoughtful in his leadership,
11 and I think that this thoughtfulness and this
12 rumination, if you please, of going over in his
13 mind, will that work, will this work, is this a
14 good thing to do, sometimes he thought out loud and
15 threw those ideas out, and then he was pragmatic
16 enough to withdraw them if he didn't see the
17 support for them.

18 I think he had ideas for the AFT in trying to
19 organize it regionally and make those regional
20 offices work. Of course, there were a number of
21 drawbacks on that, because we didn't have the staff
22 to fully staff each regional office. They became
23 stretched too thin to do the job that they were

1 expected to do. And you again had to turn back to
2 the national office for support and their staff was
3 watered down by spreading all over the country.

4 So, it didn't work as well as it should have,
5 but I think it was something that should have been
6 pursued.

7 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Right now, both
8 Mary and I are talking a little bit about the years
9 that I served on the Executive Council and
10 following that as a member of the AFT staff serving
11 as regional director of the Midwest region. Those
12 were during the years of the Seldon presidency, and
13 we've been talking a little bit about the Seldon
14 presidency and about the ideas that David had. One
15 of those ideas was the whole concept of dividing
16 the nation up into regions of a size such that a
17 cadre or core or group of AFT staff representatives
18 could more effectively service and organize within
19 a limited region rather than being sent from Miami
20 to San Francisco to Seattle, and it's a concept
21 that had great promise.

22 Probably its chief limitation, and I found
23 that to be the case when I was serving as regional

1 director of the Midwest region, and that was we
2 simply did not have the staff capability of manning
3 each one of the regions. When I encountered
4 problems within my region, we had a major campaign
5 going on, the three staff employees that I had
6 simply could not cover all the assignments that
7 needed to be made at the time of that major
8 assignment. So, very quickly on because of small
9 staff in my region and the other regions of the
10 country, we were soon sharing staff to such a great
11 extent that the fact that we had a regional office
12 became, you know, almost inadvisable because our
13 staff were so frequently needed to cover major
14 campaigns in other parts of the country.

15 However, with the current size of the AFT
16 staff, it might be time that we try on that idea
17 again because it did have many merits. Right now
18 the AFT is as close as a telephone. However, there
19 would be a great deal of advantage to having an
20 organizer who is familiar with the problem of
21 organizing in Illinois who can be called into
22 problem situations in Illinois. And as it now is,
23 any one member of the staff might receive the

1 assignment.

2 So, there are some very positive advantages
3 that would flow from a more concentrated area of
4 concentration on the part of national AFT staff.
5 That's just one example of an idea that appeared
6 like a good idea but was probably a good idea when
7 the whole idea was scrapped because it was obvious
8 that we simply lacked the resources to fully staff
9 each one of those regions.

10 One of the advantages of the regional portion
11 was the fact that you did become familiar with some
12 of the problems that happened in your region. As a
13 regional director you had a variety of requests
14 that would come to you that needed some kind of
15 action on the part of the national AFT. It might
16 be a problem in Duluth where after negotiations and
17 without information to anybody at the national
18 office that the problem was brewing, you would get
19 a call, "We're on strike tomorrow. Can you send up
20 a staff assistant to help me in this strike
21 situation?"

22 We would have a situation involving a teacher
23 who had been fired for organizing at a parochial

1 school and this was after the fact. So that as a
2 regional director, you could expect that with a
3 very limited amount of staff, there were a great
4 number of problem situations that you were expected
5 to carry out.

6 In some of the situations that we were called
7 in to cover, we had a very limited range of
8 resources that we could call on. So sometimes you
9 had to be pretty innovative. In the case of the
10 teacher who was fired by the bishop for organizing
11 a local union in one of his diocesan schools, fired
12 the guy, and we were called in after the fact. So,
13 what do you do? You appeal to the bishop, you go
14 to the central labor union asking how they can
15 influence the bishop. You try to raise money so
16 that you can mount an effective legal defense that
17 will involve the other teachers in the district so
18 that they want to be a part of the union, too, and
19 in the case of one teacher over in Lake County,
20 Indiana, we had to go through all of those.

21 MS. MARY SMITH: One of the things that
22 the AFT has had to depend on, and I think it's
23 sometimes good, is the use of part-time staff to

1 cover emergency situations or whatnot. Of course,
2 when you take a classroom teacher to cover an
3 emergency situation, it either means that they
4 leave their class or that they go in the
5 summertime. And a time or two I was involved both
6 ways. One time while Charles was in the regional
7 office, he sent me to Louisville, Kentucky, to
8 speak at a meeting of teachers there, of union
9 teachers there. I went down. Of course, the only
10 thing I could talk about was Local 4, which I did,
11 and I thought I did a brilliant job. When I asked
12 for questions, the question was, "Tell me, do you
13 have to have a gas mask when you go out into the
14 air of Gary?" And the other one is, "Would you be
15 mugged if you go out?" In both cases I was
16 absolutely put out. I don't know, apparently I
17 didn't do the job I thought I had.

18 Another time he sent me to Texas for several
19 weeks during an organizing campaign down there. We
20 had one bargaining election in Corpus Christi, and
21 we were the bargaining agent for Corpus Christi,
22 but we had small floundering locals in Austin, San
23 Antonio, Dallas and Ft. Worth, and those were the

1 areas that I was sent to.

2 I spent three or four weeks at home in
3 Ft. Worth talking to teachers there, and I maybe
4 spent a week in Dallas and a couple of weeks in
5 Austin and maybe a week in San Antonio. I don't
6 remember how long I worked, but I had gone home,
7 and I discovered that even though we had some
8 locals in Texas that we hadn't had at all when I
9 left Texas, the climate had not greatly changed.
10 You had young militants who were idealists who
11 would come and work long hours to try to do
12 something about organizing. But, of course, all we
13 could do was strategize because the schools were
14 not in session. We were simply planning for the
15 fall membership campaigns which in some cases never
16 occurred. I would have liked to have stayed down
17 there, but not enough to have left my family. I'm
18 not an organizer by nature.

19 So, I don't know that anything came of it,
20 but I'm sure that the work I was doing was work
21 that was common to organizers throughout the
22 country, and again the regional offices were
23 drawing on staff that wasn't regular staff, but

1 part-time staff to go in and fill some gaps.

2 MR. CHARLES SMITH: As a Midwest
3 regional director, I was assigned three full-time
4 staff people. Mercedes Hill, James Thurmond and
5 Tony Anderson, those three along with me and
6 occasionally part-time help like Mary, had the
7 responsibility for the whole Midwest region which
8 kept all of us very, very busy, plus the fact that
9 we frequently had other assignments to other parts
10 of the country to help out in other regions.

11 During that period of time we had some --
12 really not, I wouldn't say it's that pioneering but
13 in the late sixties is when we had a growing amount
14 of interest on college and university campuses.
15 Our most successful organizing in the Midwest
16 region really came in Illinois. That's not at
17 Illinois University, but at the board of governor
18 colleges of which there are five. One of the staff
19 people devoted almost exclusively his time to
20 organizing at the college and university level
21 working with them. In addition to that, we did
22 have a number of collective bargaining elections.
23 One fairly large one that Jean Thurmond helped

1 coordinate was in Anderson, Indiana, so that they
2 joined during the years that I was Midwest regional
3 director the number of collective bargaining locals
4 in Indiana.

5 In talking about the work of Jean and Tony
6 and Mercedes, they were all national organizers,
7 and they got their jobs with the AFT because at
8 some level or other in some capacity, they had
9 demonstrated an ability to influence people
10 interested in a union to get them into membership,
11 and not only get them into membership but activate
12 them.

13 My experience with the staff was very good.
14 Two of them, Mercedes and Tony, got to be on
15 national staff because of the leadership and
16 organizing ability that they had demonstrated as
17 members of locals. Both of them had very
18 successful experience in working with locals and
19 helping them achieve collective bargaining, and as
20 a result of that, came to the attention of the
21 national office. When openings were available,
22 they were called in, interviewed and hired to be
23 national AFT organizers.

1 Jean Thurmond from Gary, as I am, was an
2 organizer and she was a born organizer. Back in my
3 experiences as a leader of the local, she and I
4 shared in many, many battles. One of the things
5 that she mainly got the idea to do was look around
6 and see that there was a need for legal
7 representation for class action suits. We did have
8 a legal aid society but the legal aid society could
9 deal only with individuals and the kinds of
10 complaints that they were able to handle were
11 largely divorce cases. So that there was not any
12 opportunity at all for poor people to enter into
13 litigation to preserve their rights.

14 So, Jean and I and a group of other people in
15 Gary got together and set up a legal service. We
16 called it Project Justice & Equality. Jean, this
17 is about 1971, Jean and I and a couple other people
18 established that organization, went out and
19 solicited funds to fund the organization, and as a
20 result of that, we've had a phenomenally successful
21 experience in taking on some of the complaints that
22 poor people have had, particularly dealing with the
23 welfare system.

1 That organization, Project Justice &
2 Equality, continues today and I still serve on the
3 board. At the time it was formed I was president
4 of the local, and that's exemplary of the kind of
5 things that I have felt like our local union ought
6 to be doing. Not only were we dealing with the
7 school board but we also tried to deal with the
8 larger problems that confront us and Gary. Jean as
9 a result of her work in Project Justice & Equality
10 gained a lot of practical experience. She also
11 gained experience by being a worker with the public
12 welfare department, going on strike and along with
13 her other co-strikers, being fired.

14 In addition to that, Jean had demonstrated
15 organizing capability in another group that she and
16 I shared the formation of, a group at that time we
17 called POWER. And I as the union president and the
18 president of the welfare organization, welfare
19 employees organization, and some civil rights
20 groups, we call ourselves POWER, People Organized
21 for Welfare Education and Rights. Jean again
22 demonstrated that she was an organizer. She knew
23 how to take an issue and to organize people around

1 that issue, and get action. So, when I came on
2 board as regional director, one of the people I
3 looked around and said would make a fine organizer
4 for the AFT and that proved to be the case, was
5 Jean Thurmond.

6 Those are the three organizers, Tony and Jean
7 and Mercedes that I worked with as regional
8 director. Of course, I've worked with some of the
9 other national representatives as well. But
10 looking at the kind of skills and the way they go
11 about their job, it's hard to detect much
12 difference between the way the three of those
13 operated. Of course, they had different interests
14 and different specific approaches, but all of them,
15 and I think largely through their own good sense
16 and experience, were very effective organizers, and
17 in most cases, you know, did things in much the
18 same kind of way.

19 It takes a special kind of a person to be an
20 organizer, because you have to be enthusiastic
21 about your job and you have to be enthusiastic and
22 believe in what you're doing. I think those are
23 your characteristics that any good organizer just

1 absolutely must have.

2 During the years that I have been active
3 within the AFT at the national level, you know, one
4 of the main thrusts of the organization has been to
5 organize. And you know, a lot of good things
6 happened after 1964 when Charlie Cogan became
7 president. Because it's at that time which we, you
8 know, obviously became more militant and more
9 activist and we had more members that developed
10 organizing plans that were carried out during -- I
11 guess, up until the present time many of those same
12 ideas are being carried out.

13 One of the novel ideas was a co-art
14 (phonetic) plan. First of all, at the national
15 level they went to the IUD, Industrial Union
16 Department, and got a commitment for \$100,000 to be
17 used in organizing teachers. In addition to that,
18 the national went to state federations and said if
19 you'll share in the responsibility of putting up
20 money for organizing, we have this money from the
21 IUD, then the AFT national treasury will also
22 contribute so that we'll have a joint effort and
23 really do some effective organizing.

1 You know, I think most of the ideas that I am
2 going to be talking about can be directly
3 attributed to David Seldon. As I have indicated
4 earlier, he has been, to my mind, the idea man of
5 the AFT. So many of the good ideas that were
6 developed emanated from David, and the co-art
7 (phonetic) plan I think is David's plan. A part of
8 that was a necessary expansion of the national AFT
9 organizing staff.

10 So, a commitment was made during the Cogan
11 years that a greater emphasis be put on the staff,
12 and even if it meant sometimes running the peril of
13 deficit budgeting in order to be able to increase
14 the size of the national organizing staff. And it
15 was David, too, then that helped plan for training
16 of the growing national AFT staff. So that I
17 talked earlier about the qualities that a good
18 organizer would have, but that doesn't mean that
19 people become organizers without some assistance
20 and some training. The national AFT, and I as a
21 member of the council, and as a staff person,
22 attended a great number of training representatives
23 where we would go through a rather rigorous

1 training program in which newly appointed members
2 of the national organizing staff could actually be
3 trained to do their job.

4 One of the big jobs, and sometimes it seems
5 like it's an unsolvable problem, and that is to
6 actually train the people to be leaders of unions
7 and to be union organizers. The AFT through the
8 years has approached this from a number of
9 different ways. Sometime back in history that
10 precedes me, the AFT had a training program that
11 was conducted out of some of the major
12 universities.

13 How we hit on that, I don't know. My
14 presumption is that on the labor education
15 faculties at some of the universities, there were
16 faculty members who had a particular interest in
17 the AFT and joined the AFT not for purposes of
18 collective bargaining but as a way in which they
19 could identify with the labor movement. But
20 whatever the case may be, back in the fifties the
21 AFT sponsored nationwide a series of training
22 sessions at some of the major universities.

23 I know here in the Midwest, the University of

1 Wisconsin every year would have a training session
2 in which AFT teachers were invited to send
3 representatives. In addition to the University of
4 Wisconsin, we've had similar workshops at the main
5 campus of Illinois University. We've had workshops
6 at Ohio State University and Indiana University.
7 Because of the national AFT staff limitation, the
8 AFT in those years didn't have the resources to
9 have a budgeted training program of their own, so
10 that kind of training for local leadership was the
11 major extent of the kind of training that the AFT
12 was able to provide directly, and that is to in a
13 sense contract with the Labor Education Department
14 at one of the major universities to devise, set up
15 and conduct these training programs.

16 Mary and I both attended workshops at both
17 the University of Wisconsin and the University of
18 Illinois. Of course, I participated as a trainer
19 at the University of Ohio and at Indiana
20 University. Now, in more recent years the AFT has
21 so greatly expanded its organizing staff and gotten
22 people on the national staff with enough expertise
23 and training that to a very large extent the AFT

1 now does its own training of new staff.

2 MS. MARY SMITH: As Charles said, so
3 many of the people that came on the AFT staff in
4 the early years, as they came on the staff brought
5 with them a history of success in their own local.
6 One such person was Larry Sibleman who was the
7 president of the Los Angeles local. He served as a
8 staff representative for a while, and then he
9 became the director of training programs for the
10 AFT. And he developed curriculum and was the one
11 that was, as I understand it, the director of the
12 AFT training workshops for newly hired staff
13 members. I don't know what happened to Larry.

14 Jim Mundy was made the director of organizing
15 under Dave Seldon. I hardly knew Jim. I knew him
16 when I saw him, but I don't remember much about --
17 I don't have a visual image of his role in the AFT.
18 He was followed by John Schmidt, I think. John
19 Schmidt was the one we worked with. I found John a
20 delightful person to be with. He was rather
21 cavalier in his dealings with people, but he seemed
22 to know what he was doing, and to be able to sort
23 of be to fit to make the five regional offices work

1 and coordinate their efforts when a person was
2 needed out of one regional office out of another
3 region, he was the one that sent them. He was the
4 one that sort of kept -- the principal of the
5 regional or the district director of the district
6 directors maybe.

7 I think John left very shortly after Al
8 Shanker became the president, and Phil Kugler and I
9 worked with before he became the present position
10 he's in now. I found Phil very easy to work with.
11 I worked with him in training sessions and
12 organizing and whatnot in the Gary area after
13 Charles left to become a regional organizer. And
14 Phil was the one that would appear on the scene and
15 tell us what we had to do and how to do it. And
16 sometimes -- I remember one time we were very
17 active in a political campaign in the election of a
18 state senator from Indiana to go to Washington, and
19 I was president of the Local Council of Teachers
20 Unions. Phil and I got our heads together and Phil
21 went to the central labor union and got a couple of
22 thousand dollars, and then he called Al Shanker and
23 got a couple thousand dollars, and we really had an

1 organizing campaign going with about 15 phone
2 banks, and I think we had an impact on the
3 re-election of Birch Bayh that year.

4 MR. CHARLES SMITH: I've been talking a
5 little bit about organizers and what it takes to be
6 an organizer, and how the AFT has gone about
7 training its organizers. During the years that I
8 was active in the AFT at the national level, two
9 guys stand out as really devising the way that the
10 AFT still pretty largely goes about its organizing.
11 Jim Mundy was really very good in finding ways for
12 an organizer to go in and really do an effective
13 job of organizing.

14 By that I mean he organized the people so
15 that they could organize themselves and win the
16 collective bargaining election campaign. He is the
17 strategist who really found ways to get a national
18 AFT representative into a district, get them to set
19 up an organizing plan that involved every school in
20 the district, found a way to activate members of
21 the local union to do so much of the leg work and
22 really put together and tie together in one
23 cohesive comprehensive campaign an organizing

1 campaign which could be successful in winning a
2 collective bargaining election.

3 John Schmidt came along following Jim Mundy,
4 but the basic approach that an organizer used was
5 basically the same under John Schmidt or under Jim
6 Mundy. And that's still the same way that the AFT
7 appears to operate. You know, just what it takes
8 to win a collective bargaining campaign, the AFT
9 doesn't know and the NEA doesn't know. But the AFT
10 really pioneered under Jim and John Schmidt a way
11 to get every teacher in a corporation no matter
12 what size the school corporation was and get them
13 actively interested. They may not vote AFT, but to
14 get them actually interested and involved in a
15 collective bargaining election.

16 One of the most interesting and I guess one
17 of the most controversial things that happened in
18 the AFT during the years that I was active was the
19 thrust toward merger between the AFT and the NEA at
20 the national level. This is again one of the ideas
21 that Dave Seldon appeared to have pioneered. The
22 bringing up of the idea of merger initially was not
23 a very popular idea among many, many members of the

1 AFT.

2 So many of them had had histories of forced
3 membership in the NEA and had such negative
4 feelings about the NEA that they were very
5 violently opposed to the whole concept, mainly the
6 fear being that because of the relative sizes of
7 the NEA and the AFT, that the AFT would be
8 swallowed up and would very rapidly lose its
9 identity and we would be left with just another
10 NEA.

11 However, there was a kind of a grudging
12 acceptance on the part of others that were willing
13 to explore it, discuss it and see whether or not
14 there was even any potential for it. So that as
15 the issue was debated, and it was debated, I
16 remember we had meetings in the Midwest region.
17 One, we had a regional meeting here in Chicago.
18 David was present to explain to representatives of
19 locals from the area his views on the desirability
20 and, in fact, the rightness of the merger program.

21 I can recall particularly the president of
22 our local in Hammond getting up and making a most
23 impassioned plea that the AFT cease and desist from

1 any talks of merger, that the very notion that the
2 AFT would be willing to even enter into talks with
3 the NEA was just an anathema. It was David's
4 pursuit of the notion of merger even after some
5 successful experience with merger that really, I
6 think, probably as much as anything else, led to
7 his downfall as the president of the AFT. There
8 are two areas I think where differences between
9 majority of the AFT and David. One was in the area
10 of civil rights and the other, the area in merger.

11 The real difficulty on merger -- many AFT
12 people could accept the idea of merger -- but the
13 sentiment was such that merger talks could only be
14 held with the AFT adopting the position that
15 affiliation with the AFL-CIO was absolutely
16 essential under any circumstances, under all
17 circumstances, and that had to be an absolute
18 precondition toward any merger discussions.

19 David was much more flexible on that and it
20 was in his pursuit of merger talks without setting
21 up any precondition, just as we expected the NEA to
22 enter talks with no preconditions, that we enter
23 with the same thing, we expected them to. And as a

1 result of that, David made many, many enemies
2 because of his pursuit of merger without setting
3 down as a precondition AFL-CIO affiliation by any
4 merged organization.

5 Of course, as an AFT activist, I always had
6 an opinion on this whole merger question. My
7 initial reaction to the talks of merger were
8 negative. Having come from a state where I was a
9 forced member of NEA, and having experienced the
10 do-nothingness of that organization and having seen
11 it being totally dominated by administrators, I
12 just saw no value in it. When it was discussed at
13 the AFT convention when I was a candidate for
14 president, my view then was by and large we ought
15 to ignore the ^{NEA} AFT, we ought to have a superior
16 product. If we have a superior product, we can
17 sell it to teachers.

18 But I rather soon came to the idea that it is
19 going to be a long difficult process where we have
20 to go district by district and within district by
21 district, person by person trying to convince them
22 that the union offers a better way of achieving
23 goals that teachers want, that it began to make

1 some sense when I looked just at the state of
2 Indiana, the majority organization being ISTA. In
3 many ways it was effective at the state level, and
4 I envied the State Teachers Association or the
5 influence that it had on the state legislature.
6 How great it would have been if the AFT in Indiana
7 could have had a comparable voice.

8 In looking at the number of members that we
9 had in Indiana compared to the number they had, we
10 were outnumbered about five to one. And it looked
11 like a long, grim, uphill battle. So, when we had
12 locals that decided they wanted to enter into
13 negotiations for merger at the local level, I began
14 to participate in those as an officer of the state
15 IFT. I would participate in those kind of
16 discussions seeing that perhaps there is a way that
17 we can make a giant leap forward. Let's try the
18 concept of merger. And initially I was one of
19 those that would very much counsel people who were
20 involved in merger talks, you've got to lay down as
21 a precondition that you will have AFL-CIO
22 affiliation, even before you begin talking with
23 them.

1 But as I continued to think about it and as I
2 continued to watch what happened in Florida, then
3 it seemed inevitable that if there were really
4 going to be meaningful merger talks in so many
5 parts of the country, that we were going to have to
6 approach the NEA or members of the NEA or locals of
7 the NEA in a way in which we really did come to
8 them with no precondition and be confident in an
9 outcome that the AFT could live with and that the
10 AFT would benefit from. I'm confident now even
11 with some of the experiences that we've had, that
12 the AFT needs to maintain some flexibility in that
13 area, and it's still possible for merger at the
14 national level if we can really go to the
15 negotiating table with NEA and not lay down any
16 preconditions.

17 Yeah, in our own state of Indiana, there are
18 so many examples of why there's a need for merger.
19 Indianapolis is one of those good examples. We
20 have at times in the past, not within the last
21 several years, but in the late sixties, embarked on
22 a major organizing campaign in Indianapolis. And
23 we have expended from that point up to the present

1 time a great deal of resources and energy trying to
2 enroll teachers in the AFT in Indianapolis. That
3 has caused the local association affiliate to have
4 to rebuff us and mount their own campaigns. So
5 that a great deal of the energy and activity of the
6 money of the teachers in Indianapolis has gone
7 toward fighting each other rather than taking on
8 the common enemy which is the school board.

9 So, there are obvious advantages. However,
10 if we were to propose merger talks with the
11 Indianapolis Teachers Association, they would
12 probably not turn it down out of hand because they
13 probably have many members who would see the value
14 of merger, too. They would want to equivocate.
15 But they certainly would not sit down at a
16 negotiating table with us if we let it be known to
17 them that the only conditions under which we would
18 ever merge with them, if they immediately affiliate
19 with the AFL-CIO.

20 So, if there is to be a merger in
21 Indianapolis, now or any time in the near future,
22 it would require us to go to the table without any
23 preconditions.

1 MS. MARY SMITH: One of the things that
2 I guess is the difference in a good leader and a
3 bad leader is that a good leader must be pragmatic,
4 must be a little less the idealist and a little
5 more the pragmatist, and must be able to see beyond
6 his nose. I guess I was too much an idealist and
7 not enough a pragmatist and too unforgiving. I
8 always remember things that I shouldn't in place of
9 saying, well, if this is for the good of the whole
10 organization, to say but I remember when, and
11 therefore, lose the sight of the end goal. And for
12 that reason I became very uncomfortable whenever
13 Dave Seldon mentioned merger, and very sympathetic
14 when I heard anybody arguing with him, because I
15 felt like what they were saying was true.

16 I don't know, maybe part of it was jealousy.
17 Maybe part of it was the fact that I thought the
18 AFT would be lost in the NEA and the ideals of the
19 AFT would no longer be important. And therefore, I
20 was not interested in losing myself in the NEA. As
21 I watched the years pass and the years with the NEA
22 changes in position, I am not as anti-NEA as I once
23 was. I see, for example, their attitude toward

1 merit pay as being more akin to what I want than Al
2 Shanker's attitude toward merit pay. So, I may be
3 looking at a whole new ball game as far as merger
4 is concerned.

5 (END OF TAPE 2)
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1 (TAPE 3, MARCH 18, 1987)

2 MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene
3 Epstein. My interview with Mary and Charles Smith
4 is continuing on March 18th, 1987 in Chicago,
5 Illinois.

6 MR. CHARLES SMITH: Very early on I
7 alluded to what interested me and what really
8 encouraged me to become active in the union.
9 Number one, I wanted an organization that would be
10 helpful and productive in improving the conditions
11 of teaching and making teaching into a real
12 profession and looking out for the good and welfare
13 of teachers. In addition to that, I expect the
14 union to share a concern about the larger
15 community, and many times be on the cutting edge of
16 problem solving of those problems that need to be
17 solved.

18 At the AFT level, I think the AFT continues
19 to be extremely effective in representing the needs
20 of teachers. I think that by and large AFT locals
21 do a good job in collective bargaining. I am
22 somewhat more concerned about the role of the AFT,
23 its locals and the national organization in what I

1 consider to be another important function. If I
2 see a trend at the national level, it's for the AFT
3 to move further and further to the political right.
4 I see us forming alliances in the AFL-CIO among
5 those most traditional right-wing elements of the
6 labor movement. You see that in their positions
7 toward national defense, they see that in terms of
8 their willingness to cooperate with whom I consider
9 to be legitimate labor unions in other countries.
10 I see that in their adopting a Jesse Helms stance
11 in foreign relations. It's very worrisome, I would
12 expect that the AFT would serve an educational role
13 within the AFL-CIO rather than aligning itself with
14 the least progressive and the most right-wing
15 elements of the labor movement.

16 One of the reasons that we ally ourselves
17 with the rest of the labor movement is that there
18 truly is strength in unity. And I don't have any
19 problem at all with the national AFL-CIO as an
20 organization democratically arriving at decisions
21 in support of foreign policy on the part of the
22 government. We live in a world community, not just
23 a community here in the United States. And just as

1 I expect a local union to be actively involved in
2 activities within one city or one county, so do I
3 expect the labor movement in the United States to
4 have positions and attitudes on the conduct of
5 American foreign policy.

6 At the present time I think that the position
7 taken by the labor movement in the United States,
8 in far too many instances they're wrong positions.
9 But it's not the fact that they take those
10 positions that is a cause of concern to me, it's
11 the positions that they're currently taking.

12 In the way that the AFL-CIO formulates
13 policy, you know, that leaves some question about
14 how they arrive at the decisions that they arrive
15 at. The AFL-CIO taking positions, I think, ought
16 to be reflective of what is the settlement within
17 those unions. But I think that the leadership of
18 the labor movement has a responsibility that they --
19 that their members are educated, that their members
20 are knowledgeable about the issues, and that when
21 positions are adopted, they are adopted from a
22 position of information and good sense and
23 knowledge, so that if you take a position on an

1 issue that deals with a national subject that has
2 nothing to do with education or has to do with
3 providing aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, that the
4 decision that's adopted by that high council of the
5 labor movement is reflective of the wishes of that
6 labor movement. I view the labor movement, the
7 ideal would be democracy in action.

8 Unfortunately, the AFL-CIO is not constituted
9 in a way that the leadership of the AFL-CIO
10 membership, so that when they take polish
11 positions, they sometimes are very far removed from
12 any action on the part of locals or international
13 unions that make up the AFL-CIO. Every
14 international that makes up the AFL-CIO has a
15 responsibility, I think, to the organization, to
16 its members, and to society, to be a democratic
17 organization. Now, those of us in the AFT can't do
18 much about how other unions conduct their business,
19 but we in the AFT, I as a member of the AFT and a
20 former leader of the AFT have a very great concern
21 about maintaining democracy with our own
22 international union.

23 If there is a major problem with growing

1 larger and larger, one of those problems is
2 actually maintaining union democracy. As our AFT
3 conventions got bigger and bigger, we had to adopt
4 more and more rules that limit discussion, that
5 limit consideration of ideas. As a consequence of
6 that, our AFT conventions where the highest
7 policies are made, frequently are not necessarily
8 democratic in their origin. The business is pushed
9 along at such a rate that there's very little
10 opportunity for meaningful dissent. So that
11 typically a committee will make a recommendation to
12 the convention floor, the recommendation is moved,
13 limited debate and if it has been recommended by
14 the committee, then it is adopted by the
15 convention.

16 So, if there's anything that the AFT needs to
17 do, it is to look at its history and look for
18 methods and ways that we can be absolutely certain
19 that it is a democratic organization, and that when
20 we take positions, and then take those positions to
21 the AFL-CIO, to see to it that those decisions were
22 arrived at democratically.

23 MS. MARY SMITH: I'm too old, I think,

1 to still be an idealist. And I suppose that's
2 where I'm coming from. I keep remembering,
3 perhaps, the good old days that never were. But, I
4 am, frankly, distressed when I see my national
5 union taking positions, not only on foreign policy,
6 but on educational issues with which I don't agree.
7 And I feel that far too often those educational
8 issues, such as merit pay, such as the current push
9 for national teacher testing, or entry into the
10 profession or what's going to come out of the
11 profession as reflected in the Carnegie Report, all
12 of those kinds of things, I feel, that if they were
13 discussed at all on Executive Council or at the
14 conventions, were very lightly passed over and we
15 ended up with whatever position Al Shanker had
16 previously adopted, and that they become Al
17 Shanker's position rather than the position of the
18 membership of the AFT.

19 I'm still a classroom teacher and I'm still
20 concerned that when I read something that Al
21 Shanker said in the paper, whether or not that
22 reflects the thinking of the teachers I teach with.
23 We had a feasibility study for merit pay, only it

1 wasn't merit pay, it was career ladders, that was
2 conducted in our system. We had about six teachers
3 on the committee and about six administrators, and
4 they got out a beautiful book which they presented,
5 the union leadership presented it to the members of
6 the building committees who were supposed to read
7 it and bring it to the teachers.

8 Our building representative went to a union
9 meeting in which he was supposed to understand all
10 the facets of the report and bring it back and give
11 it to the members of the faculty in her building.
12 She did that and she called a meeting of our
13 building, and she pretended not to know anything
14 about what it said and said she didn't know what it
15 was all about, and sort of threw it on the table.
16 And a couple of teachers said, "It sounds like
17 merit pay to me," and walked out.

18 I wondered how often this was conducted, what
19 kind of reception it had in other schools. I think
20 that a large number of us, including me, don't
21 really understand the full implications of that
22 report. I have questions about where education
23 takes place, who conducts it, who's important, and

1 I think that that's just always been the AFT
2 position, is that the important things happen in
3 the classroom. If we're going to take our master
4 teachers out of the classroom, even for two hours a
5 day, and put in those classrooms non-teachers or
6 teachers who didn't pass the test or whatever, to
7 cover the classroom while the master teacher is
8 busily engaged in whatever things that a master
9 teacher does, then I'm opposed to that as a
10 direction that we ought to be taking.

11 I don't have any answers and I'm not fully
12 apprised of what's in the Carnegie Report, so
13 therefore, I can't evaluate it. But I feel that
14 we're far too often -- perhaps I've sometimes
15 thought that maybe Al Shanker thought he'd lost the
16 battle for getting professional pay for all
17 teachers, and therefore, he's going to take up the
18 battle for a few. And I don't like that.

19 Yesterday I spent some time looking through
20 about three years or four years of old Gary
21 Teachers which is the official publication of the
22 Gary Teachers Union. When Charles became president
23 of the local, we had one half-time person, a

1 secretary. Now we have in the local a full-time
2 secretary equipped with a lot of machines,
3 computers and equipment that can get out a polished
4 product, technical product in the way of a
5 publication. We have two full-time professional
6 staff members.

7 As I looked at the early years when Charles
8 was serving as the president of the local, we had
9 numerous activities, numerous meetings, numerous
10 people involved where you saw their names in the
11 Gary Teacher, so and so, and so and so, and so and
12 so were on the thus-and-so committee and they met
13 and they decided this or this is what they're
14 doing, and you see another committee -- and I know
15 that a lot of those committees met in my basement
16 and I know that times there was a pot of soup on
17 when they met, and there was involvement.

18 In addition to that, every Gary Teacher had
19 an article about have you read the book that was
20 published out in California about thus and so?
21 Have you tried this and that? And it was largely
22 devoted to recognizing people that were doing good
23 jobs in classrooms. It was largely devoted to the

1 review of educational material that was coming out.

2 And then the climate changes when you have
3 full-time staff that suddenly, I guess teachers
4 say, "We don't need to do that, we're not paid to
5 do it. And therefore, let somebody that's paid to
6 do it, do it." That's a part of it. In addition
7 to that, you no longer see in the Gary Teacher
8 items of educational interest. It's all bread and
9 butter. It's all let's get together and be good
10 union members. It's all that mean old school board
11 is mistreating us again. And it's no longer
12 involved with trying to take pride in being a
13 teacher and raising the level of expectation of a
14 teacher. They expect, seem to expect the worst and
15 that's what they get. To me there is a drastic
16 change in the involvement in Gary.

17 When I became a teacher in Gary, there was an
18 active Association For Childhood Education that had
19 many meetings and beautiful attendance. And I was
20 active in the International Reading Association
21 which was a council of reading teachers which
22 involved a large membership. Now we have big
23 membership in those organizations, but you have

1 trouble getting a hundred people to the annual
2 dinner. I think a big part of that is
3 disenchantment with the profession, hopelessness
4 with the profession and a feeling of, oh, well,
5 what's the use? I'll do the best I can until I
6 retire and then I'll get out. Or I'll do the best
7 I can until I find another job and I'll get out.

8 I don't see the enthusiasm and the
9 professional pride that I saw back during the Smith
10 years. I think it was partially that he was an
11 educator. All the time he was the president of the
12 union, he was an educator. He continued to educate
13 teachers on what their role should be and what
14 their role of the union should be and what they
15 should be doing to better their profession. And
16 the pride in which he held the profession so that
17 if a teacher was recognized for having done
18 something great, their name appeared in the Gary
19 Teacher and everybody saw where so and so had
20 received an award.

21 You don't see that any more. I don't think
22 it's -- I think it's partially the leadership. I
23 think that a leader like Charles can do a lot of

1 things in any organization. But I think he needs
2 the support of a national organization that is
3 strong and professional and oriented toward the
4 practicing classroom teacher.

5 Maybe the major problem is the penalty, the
6 natural penalty of being big, I don't know. I
7 don't believe that. I believe that the penalty for
8 being big is there and you lose some of your
9 individuality and you lose some of your personal
10 involvement. But I think that what's missing is
11 the involvement of grass roots members at all
12 levels. And I think that that's carrying over into
13 the national union. I think that the presidents of
14 our locals, including my own, are going to the
15 national conventions and trying to outguess Al
16 Shanker and vote accordingly. And I think that
17 they're not involving their local members in the
18 issues that confront them at their home office, and
19 I don't think that the local members know or could
20 care about what's happening at the national level.

21 I don't know whether that's because of Al
22 Shanker or if it's because of being big or it's
23 because of the complexities of modern society and

1 educational program. I don't know what's caused
2 it. But I do know that teachers in Gary are less
3 involved with their local union, and as a result,
4 less involved with their national union than
5 they've ever been before. That may be because
6 we're big, it may be because of our local
7 leadership, or it may be because of the national
8 leadership, or maybe because of both.

9 I think what unions or teacher organizations
10 are all about is the use of power, and I don't
11 think we need to be ashamed or call it anything
12 else. I think that when we say, oh, we're not
13 interested in power, oh, we're not powerful, that
14 we are diluting ourselves, and that power is where
15 it is.

16 Now, then, how do we reach that fore and how
17 do we use that power as something else. Again, I
18 think that's a quality of leadership. I think that
19 you can have monolithic power that's totally
20 centered and controlled by one person, and I think
21 that's where the AFT is right now. And I may be
22 wrong, I don't think it was so in the Gary Teachers
23 Union, but I may be -- it may be true that Charles

1 was an unadulterated monolith in the structure.

2 I don't think he was, but again, you know, as
3 has been said at other times, I heartily approved
4 of everything he was doing, and therefore, I didn't
5 question it. I felt that people grab power for a
6 variety of reasons, and sometimes it's power for
7 power's sake, and sometimes it's power for good or
8 what we visualize as good, and sometimes it's power
9 for money or other prestige or material gain of
10 some kind or other.

11 I guess one of the reasons why I never did
12 feel that it was power in Local 4 that we were
13 concerned about this, because on the contrary to
14 gaining monetary gain, we lost it because we were
15 always spending money on the local. And yet I knew
16 that the power was there and that we had worked
17 together to achieve it. And when that power was
18 gone, I'm sure that's a part of my distrust of the
19 local level now, of the local operation now, is
20 because I no longer have any power in it.

21 MR. CHARLES SMITH: During the last
22 while we've talked about some of the problems
23 confronting teacher unionism. We've talked about

1 some of the successes of teacher unionism, and also
2 some of the problems that teacher unionism
3 currently is experiencing and may experience in the
4 future. Mary and I both have talked somewhat about
5 the problems of growing and being successful.

6 During my years of activity in the AFT, we did
7 experience some large measures of success. We
8 achieved collective bargaining, very desirable
9 collective bargaining agreements. We became at the
10 local level almost a hundred percent membership so
11 that there wasn't any question about how teachers
12 wanted to be represented in one school corporation.

13 I guess along with that success it has built
14 into it, you know, what do we do next? With our
15 floundering around what to do next, we kind of see
16 our mission as an end. You know, one of the
17 problems that we have as activists and as teacher
18 unionism, in teacher unionism is that of
19 maintaining enthusiasm.

20 There are still other goals to conquer and,
21 of course, one of the things that we have to always
22 consciously pursue is maintaining that grass roots
23 involvement and that level of participation so that

1 you feel like the democratic process is really
2 operating. That's one of the AFT's mottoes that
3 democracy in education, education for democracy. I
4 think that's one of the things that has come on us
5 with size and success, is that there has been less
6 and less involvement on the part of union members,
7 because they do not feel that sense of mission and
8 that sense of zeal and that sense of idealism that
9 they did when they were embarking on a collective
10 bargaining campaign or trying to achieve a
11 desirable contract. What do we do when we don't
12 have those big major objectives hanging out there
13 for us?

14 That does not mean that we ought to suffer a
15 sense of idealism and it certainly is not the fact
16 that we have reached Eutopia as far as teaching is
17 concerned. So, I think the problem that the AFT at
18 the local and the national level has to deal with,
19 and that is maintaining a sense of urgency about
20 the work that needs to be done and finding ways to
21 be sure that all the members are involved in the
22 decision-making process, and that we truly do
23 continue to be a democratic kind of an

1 organization, rather than an organization that
2 operates from the top down.

3 I really don't subscribe to the notion of the
4 great man theory of history. I think in far too
5 many instances, most instances, that events make
6 the leaders rather than the leaders making the
7 events. And I'm convinced that the time was right
8 for rapid growth in the AFT during the 1960s when I
9 was active, and that while I may have played a role
10 in that, I can't say that some of the successes we
11 enjoyed were entirely due to me. But certainly, I
12 was there at the right time when in a sense
13 teachers were leading the leaders.

14 So, what we have to do, I think, is just
15 remain conscious of the fact that we still have a
16 job to do for education, and we still have that
17 other important role that I think unions have to
18 have. We certainly do live in an imperfect society
19 and there's certainly enough activities that the
20 union could successfully continue to follow-up on
21 so that we would all be busy the rest of our lives
22 while we're trying to solve some of our problems.

23 (END OF TAPE 3)