TAPED INTERVIEW

OF

RAOUL TEILHET

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

September 10, 1986

A STENOGRAPHIC RECORD
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(TAPE 1)

MS. RENE EPSTEIN: My name is Rene Epstein. The following interview with Raoul Teilhet is taking place on September 10th, 1986 in California. This interview is part of an oral history project contracted by the American Federation of Teachers.

MR. RAOUL TEILHET: I am one of a unique citizen of California, I'm a native, I was born and raised here in the beginning of the New Deal in 1933. My mother was a runaway from the sharecropping farms of Arkansas when she was 16. And she worked her way across the country in '29 through St. Louis and became a resident. She met my father, she was working at the L.A. County Hospital as a kitchen helper.

And my father was the youngest son of a coal miner family in Wheeling, West Virginia, and Blane, Ohio, along the Ohio River from a coal mining family from France. He was the youngest son, and my grandmother always vowed that she would keep one of them out of the ground. And so the family gave him money to come to California to the Golden Land

to avoid the dark shadows of black lung and things like that.

All the Teilhets' houses in Ohio you go into them, to this day you will find three photographs on the wall; Jesus Christ, F.D.R. and John L. Lewis, in no particular order.

The Teilhets were all early organizers in the United Mine Workers in Ohio. The family split though bitterly when my father's oldest sister married the owner of a coal mine. And in retrospect, it was a God send to the family, because he yanked them all out of the ground and gave them jobs up on top. But it split the family bitterly, and in that community it would be along class lines. So some of them defected and became stereotyped Republicans because if you're in business and management you became a Republican. That was the definition in that community, whether you're a Democrat or Republican.

My father never worked in the mines, and so he became a baker. He worked for a public agency, the county of Los Angeles, and they did not have unions in the 1930s like they do now. Albeit both

my parents came from socially economic backgrounds that would be contributory or conducive to a union orientation, it never was an issue around my house when I was young.

Both my mother and father coming to California reflect very common phenomenon of people who come to California. They tend to leave as much of the bad baggage behind them as they can. My father came out of a family that had experiences in fighting the boss in the coal mines and was pro-union, but when he got here he was so damn glad to be in the sunshine -- and you must remember that California in the late 1920s was really a shanger. You can look around California and see what's left of a paradise lost almost. There was just vast open spaces and there was sunlight and you could sit on the beach in December and get a tan looking at the snow on the San Gabriel Mountains. It had a magic to itself that people to this day -- and I'll reference it later on when I talk about organizing the teachers union -- have a tendency to want to avoid bad experiences of the past.

So my mother coming from a sharecropper

experience, all she remembers was that it was bitter work, poverty upon poverty, personal and collective humiliation for herself and her family, and there was no organizing. She was fighting, she was a "she" in a very male world. My grandfather almost disowned her when she moved to St. Louis to go to work. Only women who were headed down Main Street to the brothel would do something like that. And the Baptist orientation was mounted against her.

So she got out to California, which is freedom, and she was so pleased to be here and she fell in love and got married and became a housewife. Other than the residue, political residue, she is the only to this day pure F.D.R. Democrat that I know. She really every time there's an election, she has a test how F.D.R. would have done it and that's how she votes. She just had that kind of orientation. As far as she's concerned, the Roosevelt administration addressed all the issues that were issues in her life.

I had a dinner in my honor put on by the Democratic Socialists of America here about a year

ago, and I introduced my mother during my remarks, which is something I loath to do, but I called her the only pure and New Deal F.D.R. Democrat left. And she received a standing ovation, which I think was a response from the people there that they felt something lost in their own political world that I touched upon when I introduced her. She was a Democrat because the Democratic party that she joined in California -- and she was not an activist by any measure, she was just registered and voted regularly -- was a party that addressed the issues of her life. He brought aid to the farmers, the Rural Electrification Act. I mean, she was amazed to find out that they were getting electricity into Hope, Arkansas where she was raised. And anybody that would do that was the Wizard of Oz, and she would follow the Yellow Brick Road for that person forever.

But she also was scarred, and it affected my upbringing, by poverty. It was the overwhelmingly dominant force in her life. She is comfortable now, has a supportive family. She has no financial needs whatsoever. But if you meet her and talk to

her, within five minutes she'd be discussing poverty, how she can't afford this and it's outrageous that people aren't being helped or something. So she has an orientation for the underdog, the underclass. She identifies romantically with those groups.

Despite her background, which would lead a modern social scientist to lead to certain conclusions about her possible political orientation and maturation did not occur. I would include my father, who albeit from a little different background had the same causal factors in his background which one would logically have concluded support an activist in political terms, they do not have any political activity in their background whatsoever. They are both registered Democrats, and they voted a straight party ticket, and they both idolized F.D.R. But they also shared an absence of education.

My mother made it to the 6th grade and my father to the 8th grade. And that overstates their education. They didn't really start any education until they were married and started reading books.

And that was very hit and miss background.

My father died in 1940, and my mother was cast again into poverty and she was saved again from hardship by the war and jobs. She didn't have enough skill and background to even become Rosey the Riveter. But it did lead to a second marriage, and she became a housewife again.

She married a Republican from Pasadena, and she just didn't talk about politics. She was an anti-Semitic. He was a racist, a very hard man. And I recall, she wouldn't try to change him, but she wouldn't tolerate any overt expression of his personal philosophy in the house. She said you go someplace else and talk that crap.

She had the background of becoming an activist without the terminology or understanding. For example, she has two stepchildren and two natural sons. My oldest stepbrother was one of the founding members of the John Birch Society in Arcadia. My stepsister is a schoolteacher and what you'd call a liberal Democrat but not a radical or activist Democrat. My brother, my younger brother is a very arch conservative Republican, and I'm

active in the union and the Socialist movement in the United States. My mother favors without any question my older stepsister and myself, and while she would be uncomfortable for someone to call her a Socialist, she would not be uncomfortable if you describe what the Socialist was going to do and giving that person her support.

So in living at Pasadena, Pasadena, California, is a very liberal Republican community. It takes great pride in its tradition. It was originally founded by people from Indiana who came out during the land rush in the 1870s and 1880s, so that midwestern Republicanism. And they're gentile people. They were landed and well to do. They didn't like that man Roosevelt, or Harry Truman was really offensive to them because of his style. But they'd walk over hot coals in their bare feet before they would do anything that would be awkward or unseemly or impolite. Behind doors in the institutions of the community they played for keeps. When you're talking about power and authority and control of property and money, which I began to find out as much of a re-education once

I was born and raised and schooled and came back to teach, and then to head up, start a union there suddenly got me behind these doors and I was amazed and stunned at how raw the power was used when their authority and prerogatives were threatened.

As I indicated, I was born and raised in Pasadena and I was also in school in Pasadena all but from the first four years -- from the fifth grade on I was in school in Pasadena and I came back to teach there. I had many occasions to reflect with some of my childhood friends as to what was it in our respective backgrounds that led us to be a Socialist, a Democrat, a Republican, a don't give a damn pox in your house or whatever it might be because we all came from middle class families, or lower middle class from our background. I can't think of a single social friend that I had that didn't have that background. All of our families had experienced the Depression. None had fallen from high to low economically. As a matter of fact, they had started low and emerged in the middle class as a result of the New Deal programs and the war, World War II, and moved to

this marvelous community of Pasadena where they could live within rock throwing distance of real landed wealth and commercial success in the same schooling, the same teachers, same churches, or absence of teachers. I say absence -- religion was one common denominator we all had, Protestant, WASP community, no Jewish community, no Catholic community, good old Methodist.

And yet there's a wide spectrum of social political attitudes that came out of this. And we have imprecisely been able to determine it was there by as how we saw ourselves as individuals growing up in the community, whether you read and whether you had a family that pushed schooling and intellectual activity as an alternative. And something instinctive in some of us if we saw a situation where there was poverty or discrimination, there was an emotional response. Wherein the others there was either an anger that there was a problem or they generally joined in and became part of the problem.

It had to do very importantly with how our families saw each other, saw themselves. It's a

phenomenon in the middle class where I grew up that if you wanted to be involved in upper mobility and moved to Arcadia or locking out an adjacent lilly white upper middle class new wealth families, it was just expected that you would become Republican, and there was a social behavior, and you would go to USC instead of UCLA. And there was a whole set of rungs and paths to follow.

If you saw yourself differently, then you didn't follow those paths and your political orientation. Pasadena really had a neutral experience in terms of being raised there.

The other distinction that led to the evolution of I guess where we're going is how a kid from Pasadena can become a union Socialist organizer, its education and its impact.

The earliest things I can recall reading before I probably should have been reading them were things like Steinbeck and Grapes of Wrath because my mother said I must read this about your kin folk. And all my relatives on my mother's side who we associated with much more than my father's side were all dirt farmers, southern drawl, other

than their attitudes on race were just salts of the earth Democrats and pro-union. They all worked in Lockheed or in steel mills here in southern California, members of the Steelworkers unions or the Machinists union. So the union came through as a very positive word, and it was reinforced by reading and going to school. And Pasadena had a very progressive liberal education system which was the pride and joy of the Republicans to be on the cutting edge of John Dewey and progressive education. And with great irony they were planting the seeds, people who would come out of this experience, with a set of values that were an anathema to what they intended. So, that was probably one of the distinctions in bringing about change.

However, I hasten to add that when I started teaching at Pasadena High School, I never heard of a teachers union before. I thought AFT was the other end of a ship. It was just the furthest thing from my mind was union. I'd worked as a Teamster when I worked going through college, I carried a Teamsters card, I carried a laborers card

in the craft unions working in the summertime. I got a Machinist card at Lockheed when I worked there at night. But I did not have any intention of organizing a union or becoming a member of one.

There was a break in my life called the Korean War. The Pasadena school system, the last of it was known as the 6-4-4 Plan where the community college was part of the unified school district, and actually your last four years from your junior year in high school, the 11th and 12th grade and the first years of college were in one school and one continuous experience. If you were highly structured, disciplined, had a positive home -- positive in the sense of a supportive structure at home to help you with your school work, it was a marvelous system. If you were not, the potential for disaster and disorientation and mischief were enormous.

And I went the latter course. My first years of college I didn't complete but one semester, and I got three units of F and three units of C. Freedom without structure when you didn't have to attend classes in the 11th grade, my peer group

opted for the streets, and we played ball and just got ourselves in trouble. The 6-4-4 Plan failed because of students like myself and the community pressure to bring about that change. So my school from the last years of high school were marginal, and my first years of college were a disaster. And when President Truman sent me a letter offering me an alternative lifestyle in the Korean War, it was readily accepted. I wasn't patriotic. I knew where Korea was. Looking back on my extremely activist anti-war activities in the Vietnam War, I sometimes marvel at how easily I walked off to Korea without the slightest question. I just got a letter, the President had called, and we left.

The army experience didn't have any particular bearing on developing a union consciousness. It developed a great distaste for unrestricted authority. But what it did, again with the irony of passing of Republicans developing a progressive school system for us to become socialists and trade unionists, and the army experience gave us the GI Bill, which was a second chance for so many of us that had stumbled, without

which there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind I would never have completed college. It was a marvelous program. And it gave us a new start coming back to school.

Maturation had overcome my problems and I was deadly serious about it. I was 21 years old and a freshman in college, and I went at it rather seriously back through Pasadena and City College, which was an independent community college at that time; and on to Cal State Los Angeles where I completed my BA and MA in history. And I really didn't start teaching until I was 26 or 27.

The selection of teaching again was a happenstance of a romantic education. I always loved history and read it avidly. And if you stop to think about it, what do you do with a history major. You use it as a foundation of going into law or the State Department, and Harvard had a monopoly on that program. And I thought of using it to go on to law school or to become a librarian, or in the interim while you're trying to make up your mind you can teach.

This seemed amazing to me that someone would

pay me to stand up and talk about what I considered to be a hobby and a personal interest. But they said they'd give me $5500 a year if I would do that in Pasadena. So while I was deciding whether to go into law school or not, I went back and started teaching.

Pasadena High School in 1959, 1960 was the perfect image of the good high school in the movie The Blackboard Jungle. It was 97 percent white, it was predominantly middle, upper middle or lower upper class. 93 percent of the student body matriculated to college, either to junior college or to the university. It was a brand new school, sparkling. It had a young faculty where 40 was considered old. It had all the money it needed and community support for materials. We had large classes, but nobody knew anything different.

We came into teaching -- I say "we" from habit now, but we started thinking collectively at that time. My colleagues had not come into education with any intention of making money, we all had been drilled into our heads in the teacher preparation programs that money was not a goal of a

teacher, but it was a wonderful place to teach. Vandalism was unthought of. Truancy was unheard of. Absenteeism was rare. Assignments, anything less than 100 percent was worth talking about at lunch time. Highly motivated students, polite, rub a scrub dub, it was just a wonderland, and hardly the environment in retrospect that one would think would prove to be a fertile field for union organizing.

But almost immediately problems began to develop that became issues that became the motivational causes for the organization of a teachers union movement. Union was unknown by any of us. Going through the California teacher training program, not only did they not mention AFT or teacher unionism or the word union, there was a concerted effort, organized and funded by the National Educational Association, to condition you into becoming an NEA member as soon as possible. They had literature in all the classes. They had domination of bulletin boards. The professors flat out told you that it was important for you to join the NEA, the professional organization, that it

would be part of your evaluation and it would help you achieve tenure. So there was a tremendous conditioning process and an awareness built up.

It wasn't even an issue when I went to the man who was the director of personnel in Pasadena to sign my -- if you don't mind the euphemism -- contract at the time. It was a work permit. He handed me a membership application in the Pasadena Education Association CTA NEA, and on the application for the job in bold black letters it said, "If employed, would you be willing to join the NEA CTA PEA?" And there were two boxes, yes and no. And my mother didn't raise a dumb kid and I knew questions in bold print were important, and the yes answer had been pre-programed into my mind in the teacher training institution. And for some strange reason, 100 percent of the teachers in Pasadena, some 1200 at the time, were all in the NEA.

I didn't have the slightest problem with signing, checking the box yes and signing the membership card. There was a credit union application. The word union was involved in my

first job as a teacher, because I thought that the NEA was a union. I mean, it just never crossed my mind that it was anything else. I thought it was part of the double talk of public education that I'd gotten used to, that people seemed to use words that didn't mean anything or words that meant something other than what they should have meant. I was going through college, had worked in factories and had been a Machinist, carried an IM card. I carried a Teamster card at the creamery, I drove a route there. I knew what unions were, and I assumed that this was an employer organization, and, if anything, what caught my fancy was that the director of personnel was signing me up in the union. And I thought this is what they talk about company unionism, this is a real company union. And I kind of looked at it like a detached interest with how it was going to work out.

It worked out -- it began to reveal itself almost immediately.

One of the things that occurred when you taught in Pasadena was it was an obligation that you volunteer for a committee within the PEA or the

company union, and that was assigned to me by my high school principal. She gave me a form and she said, "Check over the committee you want to work on." These were employee committees, mind you, what we'd call union committees. So the boss had hired me and the boss gave me a committee assignment within my "own union." And I was put on the salary committee.

About the second week of school I got a note that the salary committee was meeting that afternoon at four p.m., and I went to the meeting and I couldn't believe it, sitting there around the table was the director of personnel, the man who had hired me. I kept waiting for him to leave when the meeting was going to start. And suddenly the meeting started, he not only didn't leave, he was chairing the meeting.

Being older and I'd been in the army and married and divorced and been on the streets awhile, I had presence and a certain personality that lent itself to speaking publicly, I challenged the meeting and said, "I don't understand, I'm just new here, but are you still the director of

personnel, and this is the salary committee and you're chairing it?" It was all in good cheer, I was smiling and just kind of making fun of the situation it was so ludicrous.

And I said, "Isn't there some chance we might be discussing strategy about how our salary demands are going to be presented?" And I was corrected that we don't use the words demands or proposals, that's an unprofessional approach. He got red in the face and got all huffy that I was questioning his personal integrity. I pressed it one more turn of the screw by asking him, "Well, isn't there a chance that if your boss the superintendent asks what our strategy is, are you going to tell him you won't tell him? Because I think if you answer the question that way, you won't be director of personnel very long."

And he said, "Maybe you should find another committee." I said, "Well, that's possible." I suddenly was the only one smiling in the room so I shut up. I was just amazed. And I went back to my department the next day and there were a group of kindred spirits who were my age, Korean War

veterans teaching in their first, second or third year, and I told them this story. They laughed and they said just get used to it, this is how this place is run. Which was absolutely amazing.

Late in the fall a group had organized in Pasadena called Moms and Dads for Action, MADAC, and it was a group of parents who were going to give one last try, win one for the Gipper, but it was for Joe McCarthy. And this was a group of conservatives who were going to purge the school of Communist teachers. And they sent a girl student into a government class with a tape recorder in her purse and had several other students in the class primed with key questions, and they recorded, transcribed and mailed it directly to J. Edgar Hoover. They went right by the Pasadena School Board.

The FBI conducted a clandestine investigation of the teacher, his name was Frank Benke, a magnificent Serb, born 100 years too late. Looked like everyone's bank manager. Just a guy and a gentle man. And they came back, the FBI came back to the Pasadena School Board and said that Frank

Benke is not a Communist.

The assistant superintendent for instruction in late January called a meeting in 1960, and all the history teachers in the district were told to be at this meeting. I taught the core program, English and history, it was a great strategy if you could teach both, but the problem is that most people could only teach one, so one course suffered invariably. I had a double major and was weak in English and felt that I leaned toward my social science background, history background. But what it really made us as an employee, we got to go to two department meetings a week instead of one.

So we went to this meeting, and the assistant superintendent of school George Joreen had Frank Benke, whom I didn't know. Pasadena had 4,000 students on about 40 acres and you would go months and not see the same person twice. And he taught 12th grade government and I was teaching 10th grade social studies and 11th grade U.S. history, I didn't even know the guy. The meeting started, and the assistant superintendent stood up and had Frank stand up beside him, and he put his arm around him

and he said, a quote that is very fresh and that is forever etched in my brain, he said, "We all know that Frank isn't a Communist." And suddenly I knew we were in a very, very serious meeting.

And then we got a lecture on good judgment, on exercising professional judgment in dealing with controversial subjects and learning materials we brought in the classroom. And then he said, "Are there any questions?" And I stood up -- the only question asked at the meeting -- and I said, "If I exercise good judgment and intellectual honesty and deal with the subject matter in a responsible manner but it's at variance with what Maddox thinks was good judgment, where are you going to be? Are you going to be out on the end of the limb with me fighting for intellectual freedom, are you going to be other end of the saw with Maddox?" He looked at me -- and it was definitely quiet in this little theater -- he said, "What is your name?" He pointed at me. And I said, "Raoul Teilhet." If you ever tried to write Raoul Teilhet without knowing how to do it, that's no help whatsoever. And he pretended to write it down. And he said,

"We'll get back to you after the meeting." And the meeting ended.

As I was going out, people were nudging me and laughing me and telling me I'll like my next job in Bakersfield, or you'll be a great milk deliveryman, but there was a definite feeling from my colleagues that I'd done something very negative and wrong and threatening.

The next day when my teaching colleagues -- we met for our usual lunch meeting and we talked about this experience -- there were several females, but we were mostly male, as I said earlier, veterans of the Korean War, heads of household. We were awed by the response of the teachers. And we started to reflect on our faculty, and it had a great many of them who had been hired in the 1940s. Many of them were Republicans because Pasadena was a Republican town. There was no experience whatsoever in their background of any kind of protest, civil disobedience. The ACLU was considered a left wing, extreme left wing concept to this group. We had a company union. They weren't involved at all in the

meeting. There was no recourse there to go plead our case.

We talked about going to the ACLU, and we thought that would probably be like throwing a bucket of gasoline on a small fire, and we just let it go. Our worry was about Moms and Dads for Action and the obvious passive response of the school district, or worse yet, their covert support of Moms and Dads.

And Pasadena at that time did not have a curriculum for teaching world ideologies. You weren't supposed to talk about Communism in the classroom, an incredible situation.

About six weeks later, Moms and Dads for Action struck again, and this time they developed a new form of literary criticism. They'd taken Huckelberry Finn and Catcher in the Rye, and on an accountant sheet like you're doing bookkeeping, words factored out of the books, how often in eight pages did the word "damn" come up, and there were ratios. So, Catcher in the Rye, as I recall, had like once for every 2.8 pages there was an obscene word. And they invited all the English teachers,

and those of us who were teaching the core got caught in the second net and listened to the same speech by the same guy with a different context. They wanted Huckelberry Finn removed because it used the term "nigger" and they thought that would give them liberal coverage for their nonsense.

At the end of the meeting, this time with real perversey in mind, I sat up and asked as best I could the exact same question I'd asked at the first meeting, and there was a hush and a pause, just like the first occasion, because only about one-third of the people had been there for both meetings. And he looked at me and he said, "What is your name?" And I told him. And he pretended to write it down. And he said, "You'll hear from us later."

This time when we left the room, there was no joking or subtle smiles or anything. I was jaws going through the July 4th crowd at Newland Beach. I mean, they just separated. I was ostracized as I was walking out of the room, because people were suddenly very rare.

This time when we met the next day, and I

told my colleagues who weren't part of the second meeting about it, and those who were there validated what I told them, we were really worried because there was no support system available. The association was clearly run by management, and everyone who had been there longer than I had told me it was worse than what I thought it was, it would do damage to us if we went to them, because it was controlled by the superintendent.

We then called the ACLU, and they told us until someone was fired, they couldn't do anything, or if they ordered us not to use a book, which they cleverly did not. They just suggested that we use good judgment, which is a euphemism for don't rock the boat, and don't use books that are going to cause trouble. And in the faculty, there was no history of doing anything, there was no faculty unity, other than social. So we were really concerned about that.

The third thing that happened along about April was that a committee report came back from all the social science teachers in the district who had been involved in evaluating the learning

materials for the implementation of a new curriculum on world ideology which was to start in the following fall as to what book was going to be used in this 10th grade world ideology course, which the teacher was going to be permitted to talk about Communism and Socialism and Fascism and what have you. I was on the committee, and the committee came back with three recommendations for books to be selected.

And one footnote, pointing out a book that under no circumstances should ever be considered, it was called the Wonderful World of Communism by Roger Swaragen, who was an international affairs professor at USC and a first class intellectual whore, describing Communism in terms of how many commodes they had and how many televisions they had, and ipso facto; therefore be it resolved, that it was a failed system. Just an outrageous book, intellectually insulting. But we'd been given six copies of it, so we were worried that somebody liked it. So it was the only book we said do not buy, and here are three that we recommend, any one of the three would be fine.

At the very next school board meeting they accepted our report, thanked the 20 members of the committee for their diligent work, and announced they're buying Roger Swaragen's book. And we went storming down to the superintendent's office just outraged about wasting our time. And we found out that they had purchased 3,000 copies of it the previous October before the committee had ever met.

And at the next department meeting, district wide social science meeting, this time joined by several of my colleagues, but I was the principal spokesperson, just raised wholly hell with the whole system and made impassioned pleas for academic freedom and intellectual honesty, that we'd been humiliated, and just made a general scene.

The next day after school, it was on a Friday, I was walking down the hall, deserted hall of this large high school, and here comes this Communist walking at me down the hall, Frank Benke, who I still did not know and had not met. And as he approached me, a rather large man, he held out his hand whereas if I had walked into it he'd have

actually hit me just below the belt buckle. And I looked to my right and there was a women's restroom, faculty restroom, I knew that wasn't an escape hatch. So I held out my hand to kind of ward off his hand. I didn't know exactly what he was doing. And he palmed me a note. Two adults in a deserted hallway in a public high school, and he hands me a little folded up note. And he turned and walked through a door into the main faculty lounge, which was in the building, and I was standing alone in the hallway. I opened up this note, and in printed letters it said, "We need you. Secret meeting, 41 Olive Street, Sierra Madre, four-thirty today."

If you've ever received a note like that, you have to attend that meeting, your ego will not let you pass up a secret meeting where someone needs you. So I went to this house in Sierra Madre, California, and there were about 10, 11, 12 teachers. Three from John Muir High School, which is across the city where the black students attended. About six or seven from Pasadena High School, and two or three from an adjacent district

called Temple City, Temple City High School. And a guy they said was a union organizer, Ralph Sloming who sat in the corner. Being teachers, we did what you usually do on Friday, we drank beer and whimpered and whined and told atrocity stories, who had the worst abuse of the week, and ate pretzels.

About an hour into this kind of social activity and commiserating over how we'd been violated and how terrible it all was, recognizing that everyone I've described at the meeting is teaching in an ideal school situation and nobody is worried about money because we're thrilled to be employed as teachers and paid for what we're doing. Just we were angry about the denial of the right to teach and professional issues and academic issues. This man that had been introduced as a union organizer in the corner suddenly said as a rejoinder to some impassioned story about how we were being violated, "What are we going to do about it?" And the room became very quiet. I mean, we, the collective, do action about the unknown. We're going to drink some more beer, complain, whimper and whine, that's what we're going to do, what

would you suggest we do? And he stood up out of the chair and he said, "I think we should all sign this charter in the American Federation of Teachers and organize a union, put together a demand package, take it to the school board and demand they negotiate a contract with us which would have a grievance procedure," and he went down the whole litany of what you'd find in a contract.

Well, that sounded terrific. And somebody said, well, what happens if they don't give us the contract. And in a very loud voice with his finger in the air he said, "We'll go on strike."

Well, hell, can we check with next of kin or go to the credit union or is there another plan or is there someone else up there? My response was it's about time, and what a rational answer, why didn't we think of that first, and where do I sign, and walked over and was actually the second person to get to the charter. The first was an ex-Seventh Day Adventist minister from Temple City who was president of the Dallas Federation of Teachers until very recently, Harley Hitscox. He got there first, and I got there second. And we talked and

talked and talked and signed the charter. Hell, this is the answer to all of our problems, an independent union of teachers, no management in our unit and democratic, and we'll negotiate a contract and make demands on the school board. I mean, now we're talking.

We put our heads down. We had an election, and being teachers, since we didn't get to vote on anything else, we put our heads on our desk and raised our hands. I was elected treasurer, and a guy named Seymour Sharp was elected president, and we had a union.

On Monday morning, the next Monday morning I went in and made an appointment with my principal and she could see me right after school. I went in to her office and told her that we'd organized a union called the American Federation of Teachers, and we were going to improve education, that it wasn't aimed at her. I ran down the whole sequence of the collective bargaining process, how it was going to happen. And she was about five foot ten, a very powerful personality, Elizabeth the 1st type from the genteel Bathena family. She stood up and

she had tears, huge tears running down her cheeks. And she came around the desk and took me by the shoulder and embraced me, rocked me back and forth -- it wasn't all bad -- in her arms. And I was kind of embarrassed standing there being embraced by my principal in tears. And she held me back at arm's length and she said, "You would have made a great administrator." And her verb tense told me volumes about what had occurred.

The next day we had our first newsletter out. We called it the green sheet, a flier in every teacher's box, outlining the second coming of teachers dignity in Pasadena, and we had a tear off on the bottom where they could join. We really spent hours discussing that weekend how we were going to process all these new members and get the money in and get the membership cards out to them and get the thing going.

So we raced down at lunch time to count up the members. Put it back in Raoul Teilhet's box, he's the treasurer. And my box was crammed full of wadded green sheets and they were in the waste basket. And some of them had written notes on

them, you know, "Fuck you, radical." They weren't in crayon but they might as well have been. And some of them were torn up in little tiny pieces and put in envelopes. "Get out of this school, Commie." There wasn't one single membership in the entire box.

In tandem with my principal telling me that my career was doomed in education to have brought tears to her eyes, and the hysterical, hysterical negative response of the faculty, at that instant suddenly I knew that I had reached out and grabbed hold of something bigger than I thought I'd grabbed hold of, and we were cast into a state of depression, we the six of us, at Pasadena High School who had signed that charter.

In retrospect, I concluded that we'd made some terrible mistakes at that time. Instead of union organizers, we needed group therapy leaders, because we had put forward a concept, a new concept, a very radical concept in some people's mind that hit a whole host of emotional buttons. Some of them it was a threat of bringing the union into teaching. In other words, they had emerged

the middle class, they didn't want to go back. Within their social family background, to become a teacher was meaning you didn't have to be in the union. It was a badge of honor to escape the industrial union image of their parents. Almost all the faculty were from someplace else, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and they wanted to escape that middle town, union town background. They were in the clean air and the bright sun of California and they didn't want to be in the union. They were professionals, they were white collar. And we posed a real threat to them. We were going to take them back into that psychologically.

Then there was this ideological fear that unions were dominated by Communists or radicals or trouble makers, that there would be strikes, that I'd lose my job, that something bad will happen to me.

The third group were NEA fights who were invested in the professional organization as a strategy for their lives. And in one action we put into question everything they stood for, believed in or had ever done. And they felt offended, like

a slap in the face.

Then the management control was enormous. Elementary principals called meetings and brought their whole faculty together and lectured them on the evils of unionism and collective bargaining and pitting you versus me as your father image. I mean, outrageous, illegal activities in any collective bargaining society I've ever heard of. But the norm for management control, in not just Pasadena, but school districts all over the state of California.

If we had greater understanding of people and were better organizers at that time or had guidance from the AFT's international, we wouldn't have made the mistake of ignoring the important issue of concept itself. In fact, we put that down. As a tangent from that error, we attacked the concept of professionalism, because it was we thought the 180 degree opposite of unions, so we made it an enemy. Without thinking about it, which we should have, we took a concept, being a professional, which has high esteem in our society, and turned it into a point of our attack, negative attack and demeaned

it and tried to humiliate it.

And secondly, we ignored how the people saw themselves as teachers. Instead of saying the union was a positive way of enhancing your professionalism by making you a stronger, more dynamic, viable professional with true professional autonomy as other professions have, we made the mistake of demanding they fall into the very mold, the trade union CIO mold, if you will. We didn't have enough sense to organize them as a craft union. We argued that they were like Auto Workers and Steelworkers and Mine Workers, and we're all together with locked arms in solidarity, which means they took as a personal threat.

And we made enemies of people who should have been friends because of that first mistake. We approached it as if we were teachers instead of trying to pretend we were trade union organizers and developed a lesson plan to bring the class along, first vocabulary, conscious raising, concept understanding, positive reinforcement and review, and take a little time instead of demanding that they all joined the IWW immediately and hit the

bricks with this, we would have been much more successful.

Because now we found out -- and just to leap a little bit ahead, in 1970 when the CTA voted to come out for collective bargaining, their board of directors met on a Saturday, voted that collective bargaining was an acceptable policy for the organization, that strikes, if in the interest of children, were a professional activity, and by Monday morning 150,000 people had signed on as trade unionists after we had knocked our head against the wall for 15 years in California without ever getting them to sign over -- they turned over immediately by fiat. So it wasn't the message that was wrong, it was the way the message was being packaged and presented.

(END OF TAPE 1)

(BEGINNING OF TAPE 2)

MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene Epstein. My interview with Raoul Teilhet is continuing on September 10th, 1986 in California.

MR. RAOUL TEILHET: Let me frame California teachers organizations at this time and to briefly run through its evolution.

In 1960 there were approximately 189,000 teachers in the K-12 schools in California. All 189,000 or close to 98 percent of them were in the CTA. The California Teachers Association was a very strong state association, one of the very strongest in the entire NEA network. Their strength was derived from its membership, and the membership was organized around one issue and one mechanism. The issue was they guaranteed everyone insurance. They got life insurance, auto insurance and homeowners insurance at group discount rates. And they ran campaigns in the schools that if two-thirds or three-quarters of the teachers did not sign up for the program, none of the teachers would be protected. It's an old union technique. So, consequently, people were signing up for

insurance who either didn't want it or need it but it was part of the group thing to do.

Once they got them in the organization, they were told if you quit the organization you lose your insurance. So they had an economic interest hook very deep in the psyche of the teachers. We found over the years it's easier to get them to change their religion than their auto insurance. The commitment of the American social structure is much stronger towards the car than anything else.

The mechanism that was effective was that they had management in the unit, and the elementary school principals were given what they called 100 Percent Clubs. If all the teachers in the school joined the CTA, the principal then would be given a 100 Percent Club award and they'd put it up on the bulletin board. And if you were the only one that didn't join, the peer pressure for this nonsense was incredible. So they really had a classic company union with economic binding programs and the shop stewards were the boss, the foremen. So it was really a powerful operation. They had control of the profession from top to bottom.

On the issues front, what we were proposing in each of these things the association was opposed to, we were for collective bargaining, they were for professional negotiations. We were for binding contracts, they were against them. We were for teacher representation and legal matters and they were opposed to that. We were for political action and they were opposed to that. We were for strikes and they were opposed to militancy. We were for affiliation with the AFL-CIO and the trade union movement for political allies in strength and they were against them. We were for management being outside of the unit. We were for binding arbitration, grievances, they were opposed to it. Other than that, we were very compatible organizations.

However, in the decade from '60 to '70, with the explosion of the AFT in eastern cities and the winning of the contracts then that staggered the imagination, I remember parenthetically when people would come out from the east coast and talk about the New York City contract and they talk about you start at $9,600 a year, and in seven years you're

making $18,000, and it took our breath away. And then the punch line would be, and that's with the classified, what the custodians make. I mean, the thought that you could make money and have economic benefits staggered the imagination. We were organizing around professional issues and the right to teach and academic freedom and controlling learning materials. And suddenly it came to us in a burst of light that you could improve your wages and you could have fringe benefits.

And in 1963 before the passing of the school board proposed a participatory dental program where the employee would pay 75 percent of their premium and the employer would pay 25 percent, the district went to yellow alert. Every single board member made a speech on how Eastern Europe Socialism was not going to wash up on the shore of Pasadena. Where we read collective bargaining contracts all over the East and Baltimore and Boston and New York and Detroit and Philadelphia and Chicago where they were getting psychiatric care in the UFT. So, that began to catch people's interest when we finally began to offer them money.

Our organizing problem was a burden that we carried. Sometimes it's called an albatross. That was the six letters and the hyphen in the center, AFL hyphen CIO was used against us to convince teachers not to join. Because the latent and overt prejudice against the trade union movement in this country was really manifest and very apparent in the teaching profession.

Ironically, the AFL-CIO, if they were half as good as we said they were and do one-tenth of the things we claimed they could do, it would be half the price sometimes. But actually the AFL-CIO in California was very uneasy about teachers coming into the union movement. It wasn't just teachers, it was public employees. The public employee trade union movement was a new phenomenon in the 1960s.

In 1960, a then assembly man from Monterey Park, California, named George E. Brown, Jr., who is now a congressman from San Bernardino, wrote into law what we call our Magna Carta. It's called the George E. Brown, Jr. Act. It said that public employees had the right to organize in the unions, and the employer could not discriminate, coerce or

intimidate or restrain anyone for their exercise of that right.

That suddenly meant in Pasadena we could join the AFT without fear of being fired. If it would have started one year before, they would have been able to intimidate us and fire people, but we had the law in our arms and we'd go to court to prevent the boss from doing anything to us for joining the AFT. So all city, county and special districts, such as school district employees suddenly could organize into unions.

And the private sector dominated AFL-CIO had just assimilated the CIO element into its ranks when suddenly they had a group of public employees. We were called tax eaters. The simplest business agent can figure out that if he gets a five percent pay raise for his members as plumbers and the public employees raise the school taxes ten percent to get a raise, that we simply shifted that money right across to the public sector.

And we were educated and we used big words and there was social class friction between the teachers coming in into the trade union movement.

We were not embraced, so we received very little direct support from the AFL-CIO. I mean, there were some individual AFL-CIO organizers that helped us. But the movement did not give us money, legal assistance, organizing, training. They accepted our per capitas and with their eyes closed as slits watched us come into the union temple and become members.

Just in recent times that it's become an easy relationship. And yet, that was the central organizing obstacle that we had to overcome, was the prejudice against the AFL-CIO. So we were telling everyone, saying the AFL-CIO was wonderful and grand and political allies in Sacramento, with strength they would be behind us if we were on strike, and privately many of us knew that if it ever actually came down to that reality, there would be some question whether the AFL-CIO would deliver.

We had to use the union because that was the best organized, best funded social progressive elements in the United States, the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO's record in public education is beyond

peer, and they had the monopoly on the process. When you speak of collective bargaining, you speak of the trade union movement. And they had the nomenclature and the words, and in many instances they delivered at the Central Labor Council level for our affiliate.

The second element that we didn't have was the AFT. The AFT when I joined in 1960 maybe had 60,000 members in the entire country. They had in California about 2200, of which about 1700 were in the city of Los Angeles or San Francisco. And there were just islands of isolated groups -- it was like joining the French underground in Paris in 1943. We had more secret members than we had public members. It was a major issue whether you could release names of members. And the answer was always no.

So the AFT didn't have organizers or assistants to send us. They didn't fund campaigns. They sent legal money once in awhile if somebody was being fired. But they were struggling for their existence in the Midwest and the East as we were in California. Really every local was thrown

back on its own devices, on its own circumstances.

We readily sent per capitas, though, because we had to manufacture an NEA-CTA in the form of the AFT-CFT to compete with them. I mean, the people we were organizing were in the NEA-CTA-PEA, and they expected this three level response. The NEA to fight for teachers in Washington, the CTA to fight for teachers in Sacramento, and the PEA to fight for teachers here at the local level. So we had to match what the competition was providing. And so we, albeit we're not getting very much, and it wasn't that we weren't getting it, they didn't have it to give, the entire AFT movement was dangling by a thread. If the NEA had simply declared by national fiat that they were in favor of collective bargaining in 1960 and called for elections all over the country on the part of faculty to decide whether they wanted the AFT or the NEA, the AFT would be a small passing footnote in the history of teacher organizing in America. It would have been all over with, we would have been gone. But they made terrible tactical errors that led to strategic gains for the AFT.

In 1965 in California they tried to go to a half step. They put into effect what is called the Gordon H. Winton Act, and it provided for a negotiating council to be established in every school district on a proportional basis to the membership you have. And the Council could be five members, seven or nine. So you had to have a minimum of one-ninth of the teachers in your organization to get one seat on this council, which was empowered to involve itself with what the law called professional negotiations. They actually used the word "negotiations" in the statute. But it said you could not sign a contract, and agreements were not binding on the school board. But it was a hesitant step. Instead, simply if they at that time had said that the negotiating council shall be determined by a secret ballot election instead of by membership, the AFT would have been gone in California, we'd have been gone overnight, completely eliminated.

What it did is it gave us a tremendous incentive. We'd go to the teachers and say if you will join the AFT, and you can be a secret member,

and we get two-ninths of the teachers, the AFT can have two seats on the council and give you better representation. So people began to join to where we could gain more members to get a higher proportional percentage of this negotiating council which had no authority or power, but it had the semblance of power. It was a step, what they thought was a step forward. It was a step that really bought time for the AFT to grow.

They had the second golden opportunity of putting the AFT completely out of business in California and probably could have headed off collective bargaining forever, because teachers probably would have opted for professional negotiations and a memorandum of understanding forever if they hadn't kept us alive at that time.

One of the striking differences, and it's remained such to this time, between not just California but in particular California and other major states across the country was that the AFT for the most part grew in major cities in the East. For example, in New York at this time by the mid 1960s the UFT had been established, it had been on

strike twice, it had negotiated three contracts and it was the beacon light district for the AFT, but that was in the city of New York. The rest of the state of New York called the Empire State, the Federation of Teachers had about the same circumstances this AFT did in California or Illinois or Michigan. Outside of those major cities, the AFT was almost nonexistent. We had hardly anything outside of Detroit in Michigan.

So, the strange thing that happened in California is we didn't organize in our major city, Los Angeles, or our major psychological city San Francisco or Oakland or San Diego. These, with the exception of Los Angeles, remain association strongholds. Because of that phenomenal organizing mechanism they used in the 1950s tying people into insurance programs and having the administrator so heavily invested in their organization where they had building level control for a long time, our teachers were organized. We were raiding, we weren't organizing. The teachers in California were as organized as any union could be anywhere in America. We had to convince them not only to join

but they had to quit something. And so you weren't just fighting the boss, you were fighting an organized competing jurisdictional component.

Whereas, in New York City in the 1950s, the New York City schools not only had two organizations, they had several dozen organizations. All the 7th grade social study teachers had an organization, and there were guilds by grade level, by subject matter, by ethnicity, by political orientation. It was totally fractured, it was like French politics. And somebody came along with the genius -- David Sullivan was the organizer given the most credit for it, he was the architect of forming confederations of existing organizations into one union, and then out of it became a merged group called the UFT. In California you only had two choices, originally one and then a competing one. And so LA City and San Francisco had always been us versus them instead of giving us some political opportunities they had in New York City. What we hit upon as a strategy was the fact that albeit we were small, due to the law in California if you had a mimeograph machine and

ten members and a lawyer, you could raise absolute hell with the entire system. So, consequently, the first battle was just to exist. It was a moral demonstrable political victory to exist. We could be recognized, get payroll deduction, have a newsletter, have your name on the bulletin board, go before the school board and survive to the next year was a victory of the first magnitude in their eyes and it gave us great credibility.

The second one was that we became the ACLU for teachers, the defenders of the dam. The CTA was in the habit of not defending anyone for any reason because management was sitting on their boards. So anybody that had a grievance or had been dismissed or wronged, right or wrong, we would represent them. And we would go to court, and as a general rule we lost 90 percent of the cases, but we got tremendous visibility of standing up for teachers. So the word got out that if you're in trouble, call AFT, call CFT, call the PFT. The teachers union, everyone, they might not want to join us, but if they were in trouble they came to us first, not second.

As a result, with some modicum of pride, we can point to the fact that 90 percent of the case law that defended teachers' civil liberties in California was won by the AFT, all the major cases that are cited were AFT cases won in the 1960s by individual teachers who were willing to stand up and take their chances and a small group of AFT people who would raise money and hire a lawyer to defend them.

This reputation expanded the word that came west that collective bargaining can improve your economic standing, you can make more money, get fringe benefits. So we began to publicize what the contracts in the East had to say. That was probably the first major thing that the AFT did for us, they'd send us AFT contracts from major cities and we would print up a section of them and print them up and send them out to teachers in California.

Combine this with the Winton Act, which I mentioned earlier, and we had an organizing vehicle of convincing people to join the AFT for reasons. They got job security, they got legal protection,

they got the romantic image of being a radical or a fighter. They also could fight for making more money and fringe benefits. And if just X more of them would join we'd have another seat on this silly Winton Act Council.

I became president of the CFT in 1967, and we had 6,500 members in the state. By 1976 we had 32,000. And it was simply organizing around this silly thing and getting seats on the Council. So it was just a tremendous organizing period for us. And we were evangelists. I use that term evangelist in the sense that there is a striking similarity between recruiting into the church, the Protestant church and trade unionism. We went out like Johnny Apple Seed to the land, five, six nights a week, every afternoon. Where we could find two teachers that would meet, you came in and you had a litany, you had dogma, you had martyrs, you had movement, you had spiritual songs, you had goals of heaven. They had a devil's symbol, the boss. You were really preaching in terms of from school district to school district. And at that time we organized over 150 locals in California in

the school districts. If you could find ten people to sign a charter and dumped them in the tank and they came up born again unionists, and then we were on our way.

It was burning over the fields in the sense of a movement. We were everywhere. There are 1100 school districts in California. If you put the northernmost school district in California on the city of Boston, the southernmost one is in Charleston, South Carolina, and it runs from Chicago to New York City. So there was plenty of room for activity. And we literally created this sense of movement.

The association was beginning to panic because not only was the idea taking hold, the concepts that we were teaching taking hold -- I point out I just inadvertently said it, we were teaching instead of organizing. They were learning the values of collective bargaining, collective action. And the teachers, their own organization was being the demand, why can't we do this in the association. Why is the superintendent sitting on our salary committee. Why can't you hire a lawyer

and defend our rights. Why aren't we going on strike and winning contracts like they have in New York City. Why are you being dominated by the school marms, the Republicans and conservatives. Why aren't we taking aggressive political action.

Even social issues came up. California was heavily invested in supporting the organizing of farm workers for the first time in this country and opposing the war in Vietnam. And the association, why not go and be a part of these things.

The net result of this was that the pressure built to such a point on the association that they had to do one of two things, either change their entire philosophical thrust and their structure. By philosophical thrust, change their opposition to collective bargaining to support for collective bargaining. And by their structure, get school side principals out of the union, out of the unit. Those are the two big things, or to merge with us. And they had to make the changes or to merge. By 1970, the pressure for those changes on both fronts had arrived at such a point that there was change and there was talk about merger.

Within the AFT in California we began to find that there were real differences between our rank and file orientation and the national AFT. Part of it might be ascribed to the facts that there was a difference between the East Coast and the West Coast or Midwest and California, and that certainly is true in many respects. But I think the real cause of it was that we were isolated for almost a decade from any mainstream party participation in the AFT. By the mid 1960s, a few of us were starting to drift to AFT conventions for the first time. Part of that was just a matter of surviving to the next school year in building our own organization internally in California.

I remember the first striking difference was the AFT from our perception at that time, the national caucus dominated the AFT when Carl Megel was president. And we had one of the national vice presidents, Eddie Irwin from the Los Angeles community college district, which is Local 1021 at that time, part of the LA City schools, and every so often Eddie would show up at some meeting and we introduced him as a national AFT vice president,

he'd stand up and wave his arms and say a few things and that was about our sole contact.

In 1964 we got a letter in the mail from the president of the Chicago teachers union, Fuchs, urging us to vote for Barry Goldwater, and we knew it wasn't a monolithic organization by any stretch of the imagination. But by the mid 1960s, Charles Cogan had campaigned to be president of the AFT and came to California, and we'd seen a real live New York City schoolteacher. And we sent delegates and we joined what was called the Progressive Caucus, which was the minority caucus, the caucus we felt comfortable with because it was for strikes, militancy, collective bargaining, political action, and it was our kind of union. And we identified with the UFT local too over in Chicago, Local 1. And the first president that anybody in California had much influence over outside of the city of Los Angeles and San Francisco, which had a longer history than the AFT, and I'm just talking about now, was the Cogan election and the moving to power of the Progressive Caucus, which encircled almost everybody in California. In fact, Eddie Irwin lost

his seat as a national vice president at the convention in Chicago I believe in 1964 or '65 when he slept through the election, and in his pocket were the votes that he lost by. And that was the end of his political career in the AFT, and the Progressive Caucus won the majority of the seats on the Council for the first time. And by the next election, they won all the seats, and the National Caucus was out of business.

The AFT we found out that on the social issues of our time, with the sole exception originally of the civil rights movement, the AFT has a tremendous proud role in the civil rights movement and the UFT was a leadership element within that. But the issue that ripped across America and the Vietnam War, our AFT movement in California was heavily invested in the peace movement, and we were startled to find ourselves in the minority position within the national AFT. I remember a convention in '68 in Cleveland, my date might be wrong, but it's roughly along that period -- very late at night after a long, long bitter debate over a resolution to oppose the

military intervention in southeast Asia, a delegate from Cleveland climbed up on a chair and ripped open his shirt and showed us the scars on his chest and said, "I fought for this country in World War II and I'm willing to fight again." And everyone stood up and cheered, and we were stunned. As a result, the AFT in California got assigned the role of radical left in the AFT movement, which has cost us dearly in terms of organizing support, political support during our organizing days.

We also were closely involved with the United Farm Worker movement because we were a parallel union. We started about the same time, and many law firms took us on as charity cases, pro bono law, and we found ourselves after the AFL-CIO convention being treated the same in the eyes of the delegates as the poor struggling farm workers and the poor struggling school teachers.

The AFT at first was chilly and unresponsive to the farm worker plight until the UFT and George Altemeris in particular from the UFT hierarchy adopted the issue as his own, and we always got an audience, and resolutions were passed and they

became supportive, but it wasn't a splitter. The war was definitely a splitter.

The social agenda as a union issue was both a splitter within the union movement here in California as it was a splitter between ourselves and the national AFT. There are many members who argued that if it ain't directly related to my classroom, we ain't going to be involved in it. And if it isn't wages, hours and working conditions, we shouldn't be involved. If it's a splitter we shouldn't do it.

Our answer as leaders that time, we had several points. One that I remember demanded involvement. You can say let's not do it because it's a splitter and it's not on the proper agenda for collective bargaining, you can't bargain with your school district at the end of the war so why should we be involved in it. But our members decided it was such a powerful, overriding issue in our society that every meeting you'd go to it would be raised by somebody. So you'd always spend all your time trying to talk people into not raising it or else deal with it.

Number two is that some of us had at least a broader vision for the union movement than was suggested by not getting involved. The Socialist Democrat agenda which was very strong in the AFT in the East at the higher leadership intellectual levels had as one of its premises this was an entree to power in American government. We could find a weak union, become dominant within that union, become dominant within the AFL-CIO, become dominant within the Democratic party and become dominant within the government with that series of mechanisms.

And for someone to come along who I knew bought into that strategy and tell me that we shouldn't be involved in dealing with the issue to be or not to be in the Vietnam War, simply told me that they disagreed with my position, not my strategy. They're involved in the same strategy, but they just want a different outcome to the process. And we didn't resent that because that was fair enough, we could go to open conventions and debate the issues. And if we could persuade 50 percent plus one to vote for us, then our policy

would become the end result of that strategy that we believed in. And we thought that's what was hurting the trade union in general was that had lost their way and didn't recognize that the very quality of life in our society was something they had a responsibility to create and mold for their membership, as well as negotiating a contract at the bargaining table.

One of the perspectives that emerged from the debate in the AFT over the issue of involvement or non involvement of the United States in southeast Asia was that many of us in California who really fancied ourselves as pragmatic ACL Democrats as we'd say on Saturday night and having the right stuff, we'd claim we were Socialists. There was no structural frame of reference in California of any significant nature, above all in the labor movement, or even outside the labor movement for that political ideology to take hold or to gain recruits. When we got involved in the AFT at the national level and national level politics, some of us were approached by AFT leadership in the East. I remember Sandy Feldman on a weekend in New York

City along the spring of 1970, '71, somewhere along there, making a conscious effort to have me join the Socialist party USA at that time before it split over the war into the Democratic Socialists and eventually DSOC, Democratic Socialists of America. And on that single issue, that difference on the involvement or non-involvement in the Vietnam War, not on civil rights, albeit the issue of affirmative action was starting to emerge as another splitter issue due to the third major strike in New York City over the Ocean Hill/Brownsville decentralization issue.

But I didn't join, I refused to join at that time because of the hostile position of that faction of the Socialist party to the anti-war movement. And from that emerged through both reading and personal contact and talking to people in the AFT, Dave Seldon being primary amongst them, began to pattern an outline of the Democratic Socialist strategy and its strong role in the AFT through Yetta Shackman, Al Shanker's secretary, finally in my mind formed a linkage with Socialist Shackman and the Shackinight strategy, which I was

familiar with, and supported and believed in and believe in now and think the AFT is playing a very strong role in that direction of influencing public policy in the direction of our federal government and hopefully eventually state and local governments to a more progressive, enlightened society, representational government that emerged as a real force in the AFT, and you began to look at people almost first in the AFT not that they were in the Progressive Caucus or not in the Progressive Caucus, but whether they were SD or not SD in terms of their political orientation. Because that little bumper sticker became the code word for a whole set of strategies. And I believe that it's a proper role for a union to play to go beyond the bargaining table, and above all, as the newer collective bargaining is emerging upon us is sometimes a lose lose process that you have to deal with laws and congress to achieve ends that you used to at the bargaining table.

A classic example of this new need to re-define ourselves as a union and be part of and hopefully a leader of a coalition political

strategy was the incredible havoc that one man with one idea at the right time for the wrong purpose named Jarvis and Proposition 13 which plowed under and won legislative populist vote of the people of California for collective bargaining. For all intents and purposes, collective bargaining as an economic vehicle doesn't exist because it shifted all the funding, all the revenue making, 80 percent of it from the local level to the state, and so you have to go to the state now to get a revenue bill, and if they give you six percent at the state, that's what you're going to get at the local level, you don't bargain for anything. It changed the entire nature of collective bargaining in California. So that's an example of the kind of issue that transcends collective bargaining which you cannot organize a union by itself to bargain away. You have to organize a coalition, work with other allied organizations of people, put together a political operation to represent your members, just as you did at the local level in collective bargaining.

As a result of this, we found ourselves

spending much more of our time organizing other organizations to work with us. For example, we formed something, a coalition called the Citizens for Education, which incorporates all the employer organizations in the public sector, AFSCME, SCIU, the AFT, the California School Employees Association, the California State Employees Association, PTA, Legion of Voters, ACLU, various political organizations, Republican and Democrat, into a coalition that organized around the simple issue of adequate funding for public schools. So this was the result of Proposition 13. We saw how Jarvis did it and we recognized that we'd have to broaden our base, you can't do it alone.

And the AFL-CIO played a leading role in the organization of this coalition. And it's been we think a weakness of the AFL-CIO historically. George Meany always had great disdain for association with any outside organization, that if the union didn't dominate it, control it, he didn't want to be party to it. And in the modern political world we're going to have to find allies to help us get enough people elected from various

districts to put across legislation for adequate revenue for public schools.

The union movement has not totally embraced this idea, and they've been somewhat hesitant to break out of the Meany mold. But ever since Lane Kirkland has become president of the AFL-CIO, we've gotten much more support from the Central Labor Council and the AFL-CIO staff people than we have in the past. One of the problems this develops is it detracts from the reasons for people to remain part of the unions at the local level. If you're going to do it with my vote through a coalition to get the state legislature to give us six percent more money, which is going to go right into my pocket, the six percent level, why am I paying dues at the local level?

The second problem, ironic side effect is that because we were so successful at the ACLU for teachers and we had such strong laws protecting individual rights, they don't need the union to protect their job security any longer. Their contract isn't the security of their jobs, the state law and court and precedent and lawsuits that

we won are really the foundation of their job security. If you look around for reasons for people to be involved, we find that to be involved in social issues in society affecting the broader community is a reason to be in the union. And I think the AFL-CIO has come around to that same circumstance now.

One of the ironies both historical and projecting into the future is that within these coalitions we find ourselves sitting at the same table on every single occasion with NEA, CTA, whatever the association might be. And we find ourselves locked in arms philosophically in terms of issues with our union brothers and the association on almost every circumstance.

The issue of merger is again active here in California -- I say again, without having raised it. To give it a frame of reference, we are currently involved in talks with the California Teachers Association right now, representatives of the state AFT, because of the fact that we find ourselves -- as contrasted with ourselves in 1965 -- in 1985, 1986 we find ourselves both

believing in collective bargaining, believing in the right to strike, running strikes, believing in binding arbitration and contracts, grievances, political action, coalition politics. The NEA used to be to the extreme right and the AFT to the extreme left, now we've crisscrossed where it depends where you are in the country before you can say that. In other words, each organization has a left to right spectrum.

We're caught up in the same Proposition 13 phenomenon of revenue control at the state or national level. We both believe in coalition politics, and our members are beginning to demand it again as they did in 1969, 1970 that we get together at that time, due in no small part in total to the vision of Dave Seldon who was president of the AFT at that time. Dave is a cracker jack organizer and has a natural vision of the future for public employees. Maybe he wasn't the best union administrator that ever lived or union politician, but he certainly recognized where we were going from the beginning of the 1940s to this day. And at that time he began to argue that

in very short order the NEA was going to change its position and come out for collective bargaining, and if we weren't prepared to take advantage of that opportunity, they would overwhelm us with their numbers. And if they didn't overwhelm us with their numbers, they'd eventually do it by attrition. Because if they bought into collective bargaining and went for contracts, the history of the trade union movement tells us that once the pie is cut up, jurisdictional changes come along with the regularity of Halley's comet, they just don't happen. Once the pie got cut up and we got the small piece of it, eventually attrition would do us in as a movement and we would lose our progressive direction that we thought we could bring to the union movement, and the NEA would become the AFL-CIO teachers union and the AFT would be out of business.

So he argued that we had to be prepared to do something very difficult, and that was go to the faithful -- back to the analogy of the church -- and tell them that the pill was in, that abortions were good, that divorce was acceptable, but you can

still be a Catholic. And when you take risks like that, you can't turn light switches and change membership allegiance, they resent it. So it's a high risk activity when you represent people to change dramatically on any issue after you spent so much time convincing them that they were right where they've been taken.

So, Dave began talking as early as '66, '67 in my contact with him about a vision of United Teachers of America, democratically affiliated with the trade union movement, of which the AFT would be a strong left center driving force within this new teacher organization. And at first it was resisted by many people, they were opposed to it. You don't go to bed with the Devil. And albeit the rationale behind it was overwhelming, every time you raised the question or pointed out the reality that have been in the AFT, which for the most part was in the NEA first, and if they affiliated with labor, that's their goal. And the history of the labor movement is full of amalgamations, consolidations, mergers, co-options and such organizing activities. And that if we really wanted power we needed

numbers.

The reality and the logic of that line of reasoning began to take hold, and the AFT Councils, both here in California and nationally, it began to become a majority position of at least the leadership role of the people I was in contact with. Here in California we had a unique opportunity for the merger concept. The city of Los Angeles, the only major city in America that I can think of that was not an AFT city at that time had 19,000 CTA NEA members and about 2200 AFT members. And our AFT local in Los Angeles couldn't get started for the same reasons I've been describing. The members were tied into their insurance policies. As early as 1968 they organized what was called the Association of Classroom Teachers in Los Angeles. They had broken with the CTA and came out for collective bargaining, demanding contracts, talking about strikes. In other words, doing unto us what the Democratic party did to the Populists in the 1890s, they just took our platform overnight and it was gone, and we were left with 2200 ideologues, and

they had 19,000 people who were in the union but didn't understand what it meant.

And they had arrived at a point where they wanted to go on strike to get a contract. Their executive director was a guy named Don Bear who had cut his teeth in the NEA in Milwaukee and was really a unionist in terms of his strategy. He understood the process. And he thought that even though we had a law in California that said you could not have a contract, that if a teachers union of 30,000 people went on strike and shut the place down, that they had to give them a contract.

The second thing he decided was that he couldn't do it without the AFT membership, that his own association members would fall by the way side when the crunch came in the strike and that he needed the AFT members who were militant to be the picket captains, the strike leaders and the core of the strike. And that without us, he couldn't succeed.

And we added to that perception -- albeit at the time we didn't know this, it's all hindsight through revelation -- they called a one day walkout

just for the exercise to get their people to do it one time just to get the feel of it. And with our urging from the state CFT, we persuaded the 1021 executive board and our president Larry Silbeman to declare a general strike -- not a general strike but an open-ended strike, to go on strike for two days. In other words, they were going to walkout on Thursday, and we said let's stay until Monday and see who we can drag along with us. And we will in a classic, radical political strategy escalate the demands, compel a response that they didn't want to give and take advantage of the results by organizing the people who would be angry about it, who feel that the association by going out one day and going back in sold them out. If they stayed the second day, we could recruit those people.

Two realities came out of it. One, we were wrong. The people who stayed the second day weren't mad at them, they were mad at us for not being able to sustain our claim to go to the third day on Monday. And two, the NEA became absolutely convinced that the only way they could succeed was with us, because we could play a spoiler role if

nothing else. So you had two organizations that were groping around in the dark with short-term and long-term strategies that crisscrossed at various points, without any awareness where these points were going to be.

A year later the association leadership contacted the local leadership here in Los Angeles and proposed secret talks to merge into the United Teachers of Los Angeles. Dave Seldon was active at the national level at this time forming committees for contacts with the NEA. There had been one merger I believe in Flint, Michigan in which our local disappeared overnight, it was a dissimilation. There were talks in Florida, in New Orleans. There were articles being written all over the country about the issue of merger. Every educational leader was asked are you in favor of it or opposed to it. And we were actively campaigning on the issue here in California. We'd go into schools and we proposed a merger at the local level between many of our affiliates in the association. They continually said no, and the teachers would be upset because they thought it was a wonderful idea.

You go to Pasadena or Poway or Elhammer or Burlingame or Sacramento and walk up and grab three teachers out of the faculty lounge and say, "Do you think the NEA and the AFT should merge?" Ninety-nine percent of them would say yes. And if you would say with AFL-CIO affiliation, you'd lose half of them at that time. But at least that was an enormous leap forward that half of them would stay in the AFL-CIO even though it was part of the merger.

And if you said democratic choice for affiliation with the AFL-CIO, it would jump up to 75 or 80 percent. And what Seldon claimed would happen was right before us. He said, let's merge and worry about the affiliation question later, which made consummate sense to us.

However, the hard liners in the AFT, although Dave has told me that Shanker believed in the affiliation option as a strategy, changed his mind and demanded mandatory affiliation with the AFL-CIO when he decided to throw Dave out as president and took a much harder line on that question. Because the merger strategy created a real problem for

Shanker. If he wanted to be president of the AFT and they merged before he got to that role, he'd be pinned against the Atlantic Ocean on Manhattan Island as the president of one of the largest teachers groups in America, but to have 70,000 votes in an organization of two million is one circumstance. To have 70,000 votes in an organization of 250,000, which is what we had at that time, was a different political circumstance for him. And he also knew he had to get into the AFL-CIO Executive Council quickly, because if he didn't the NEA was going to be sitting there. Because if they merged, they would select that member to go to that council.

So all this was occurring concurrently in the country at the same time when they came to us in Los Angeles, and we met in a restaurant called the Dresden Restaurant on North Vermont in Los Angeles and they made their proposal. Credibility tests were applied to see if they were really playing serious. They were. Dave Seldon was called, and the counterpart from the CTA. I was president of the state organization of the AFT, and the

president of the CTA was involved and the president of the NEA and Dave Seldon was involved. And we all signed off on what became the United Teachers of Los Angeles, which was really a coalition organization, it wasn't truly a merger, because there's still a Local 1021 AFT and there's still a CTA chapter, and they have combined into an umbrella organization called the United Teachers of Los Angeles.

And the thrust of it from the association's side was not a religious belief of merger, it was a mechanism to incorporate the AFT militancy into their strike action to get this first contract. And so the first thing they did besides create itself with 22,000 members was to go on strike, almost immediately. Only 13,000 teachers went on strike, about 50 percent of the teaching staff of Los Angeles went out. Half stayed in, half went out. The strike should have ended in the first week, but on Wednesday night on the third day of the strike the president of the association -- UTLA now -- really a decent man named Bob Ransom, a school counselor, became concerned because there

had been a fight at one of the high schools, Jordan High School, and one student hit another one with a tire iron, put him in the hospital. Which in reality was an everyday occurrence in many high schools in Los Angeles anyway. But Bob became deeply concerned about the safety of the children and, without consulting anybody, went on television and urged all the parents to keep the students home for their safety.

On Thursday of the first week of the strike, we suddenly had professional class sizes in Los Angeles for the first time in history. We had half the teachers and half the students. And suddenly the management looked out and said they had a controllable situation. In fact, it was the best situation they'd ever had. And they said we'll ride this sucker out until they die on the vine. And what should have been a three-day strike turned into a month and three-day strike because of that. Very humanistic, passionate, but foolish political strategic act on the part of the president of the organization.

We now know that on Thursday the high school

principals had formed a caucus and were going to force the superintendent to close the schools. If they had closed the schools, we'd have been at the bargaining table to open the schools, they'd have gotten their contract and it would have been over with. The strike drug on. By the way, it was a surrealistic strike. Because it was the first strike by a merger, and what you had was that everything that was done there was an NEA lawyer and an AFT lawyer. If there was an AFT staff person, there was an NEA staff person and a local staff person. So everything had two shadows behind it. So it was really an awkward operation to run.

But as the strike drug on, disenchantment sets in, as they always do on long strikes of that nature, and when it was finally settled, they won the contract, they got the salary they demanded, they got a binding contract with binding arbitration agreements, everything the law said you can't have they won. It was a winning strike. However, then a month afterwards the court set aside the entire agreement saying you can't have a contract, you can't have binding arbitration, and

they took everything away from them that they won in the strike, everything but the six percent pay raise. So you had really a disenchanted group of teachers, really angry. They had lost everything, and what they were left with was this thing called the merged organization. And it spawned a new organization called PEG, Professional Educators -- it's called PELA in Los Angeles, Professional Educators of Los Angeles. Nationally it's called the Professional Educators Group, Incorporated, PEG. And it's a group of right wing teachers who are against collective bargaining and a really hard line right wing ideological political group. It's called nationally the National Association of Professional Educators, that's what it's called now.

So they had a merger. And with even greater irony, it is the only merger organization that survived to this day in the United States. It still exists as UTLA.

(END OF TAPE 2)

(BEGINNING OF TAPE 3)

MS. RENE EPSTEIN: This is Rene Epstein. My interview with Raoul Teilhet is continuing on September 10th, 1986 in California.

MR. RAOUL TEILHET: With 20/20 hindsight, it's painful to recognize how powerful the merger issue was, teacher union issue was at that time in 1969, '70, '71, '72. The NEA was in real disarray, because the teachers at every level were in favor of it as a concept. They might want to argue whether they should be compelled to be in the AFL-CIO, whether it should be optional, whether the organization should be affiliated or not affiliated. But the idea of the NEA and the AFT coming together under one teachers union, "union" I stress, teachers union, there was no argument any more about whether there was going to be a union or not. There was no argument whether there was going to be in favor of collective bargaining or contracts or teacher militancy or political action. It was a simple question of affiliation, which was when you consider ten years in the decade, we'd eliminated every issue that divided us with the

exception of that one. Management was out of the union, administrators had been thrown out of the NEA, with the exception of the southern states. The deep south still had both segregated chapters in 1970, they had administrators in the unit, they were anti-collective bargaining. In fact, one of the more rational arguments the NEA offered against merger was when they said we'll pick up the 250,000 AFT members and we'll lose a quarter of a million members in the South overnight and we'll have a new organization against us. And Seldon's argument was, but we'll be together and they'll have no place to go and we'll get them back within five years. You know, a view of the future. But at least there was a rationale to the argument that that was a hard core opposition with the NEA that they might lose, like Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, the Carolinas, that they very possibly would lose entire states. But we argued we could get them back.

The politics situation was tremendous. In the field here in California we used it to organize members. It was the biggest single jump in

membership in the history of the AFT in California was around a local issue called the Teacher Evaluation Bill that the association supported called the Tella Act. And the teacher unity question. Because local teachers would say, yes, we want to unify, and the United Teachers of Elmonte, and the NEA would say no, you can't. And the AFT would say yes, you can, even though they really didn't mean it. It became an organizing vehicle to get members.

When the startling news came from the East that they had, they being the NEA, and the AFT in New York state had put together a statewide merger of all the teachers in New York that they were all going to be in everything, in other words, every NEA member was going to be in the AFT and vice versa, it was just electrifying news. Because we knew that that was our golden opportunity, that the CTA could not resist us, it would just be a matter of time with that issue in the schools that the teachers would demand that we do at least what they did in New York state.

We started using that issue, and it had

exactly the viability that we thought it would. Teachers were in favor of it without exception. And the NEA couldn't defend itself in California. I mean, how could they say that's only good for New York, not for California.

And then the first merged delegation of New York went to the NEA convention in Portland, and all the information we got back was negative, that the New York people had been aggressive and tried to politically take over the convention; that Al Shanker had attacked people from the floor; that we didn't win a single seat, all of our candidates lost; and that bitter feelings existed on both sides and it's very possible that the merger in New York would be in jeopardy.

Within a year's time for the flimsiest and the most nonsensical reasons, petty personal assumptions and suspicions, the NEA was blaming the AFT and the AFT blaming the NEA they broke up the merger in New York, from an organizing standpoint to the great advantage of the AFT. When we went into it, we had 13,000 members in the state of New York outside of New York City. And the end result

of it is that we have almost 200,000 members now in the AFT AFL-CIO. Their upstate New York districts were 100 percent NEA are now AFL-CIO, and you couldn't drive them out. So, I mean, our premise was sound that once they got by the mythology of AFL-CIO and they were members and they found out they didn't lose their parking space or have complexion problems or go impotent, that they'll stay in it, and they did and they have.

In the process, it was a victory because we gained over 100,000 members in New York state and we lost the battle for the nation's schoolhouse in one sweep because it gave the NEA a whole arsenal of arguments to use against this very viable organizing gambit called teacher unity, which was viable because we both meant it, it was sincere and it was true and it was good.

And, number two, it was a mechanism for organizing the NEA members into the AFT. And we lost that as an issue because they could simply go to teachers in Michigan or Florida or anybody in California and say do you want to have what happened to you what happened to the NEA in New

York state. It's just a Trojan Horse strategy and Al Shanker will take you over and they're not sincere about it because they didn't do it there.

Well, we were outraged, just sick, furious. It was the dumbest thing that had ever happened. It was our suspicion and remains our private conviction that Al Shanker's personal political strategy preempted the national interest of the AFT's policy and stated goal of organizing teachers in America into the AFL-CIO. Because if they had merged out of Portland and expanded into a national merger, Al would have lost his center position in both AFL-CIO and himself the teachers union movement in one sweep. He'd have just been the president of the UFT because the NEA would have pinned him back politically, as they clearly indicated they could do in Portland. When they set him up a couple times, he walked right into it. The NEA is not a stupid political organization. They're very sophisticated and somewhat Byzantine, and they know what they're doing with their votes. They're state dominated as opposed to our city dominated, local dominated organization. And we're

convinced that Al willingly let the New York merger fall apart to guarantee and protect his own ascendency with both the AFT and the AFL-CIO.

From the California perspective, we were caught in a bind. On the one hand we have Al Shanker emerging as the president of the AFT. He defeated and retired the first national AFT figure to take an interest in California. Dave Seldon pumped a lot of money and staff organizers and helped us organize in California. We went down to defeat with him in the Toronto convention of '74, which was a very bitter experience.

But more problematic for us was that we had Al Shanker now, a brilliant spokesperson for public education, one of the major architects of the AFT, very active politically as substitute leader in the Democratic party, everything that you could want on the one hand. While on the other hand, we had the image projected by the NEA and sometimes by Shanker himself of being tied to his New York Jewish constituency first, to being tied to what we hoped was a long dead political posture in American society of "Better Dead Than Red, being the last

Commie fighter on the Western frontier. A hawk on the Vietnam War, a man in retreat from his position in the front lines as the champion of civil rights to being America's spokesperson against affirmative action, alienating or disenchanting an enormous number of black middle class school teachers from the AFT running a political operation in the AFT that on the surface was not undemocratic but it's an operation that was designed to deny decent or alternative viewpoints.

Part of the problem I think in retrospect was that it was really unfortunate that the UFT was such a large part of the AFT. There was no check and balance. There was no voice to challenge Al, all be he brilliant and laser beam like in his approach to problems, he's not omnipotent and he does make mistakes. And he had made policy mistakes, such as the way he handled the NEA merger question and the Portland convention followed in New York state. We think we had really an opportunity of prevailing and he thought differently. If he had maybe had a viable opposition to raise the right questions at the

right time instead of really a monolithic control which he had developed because of the numbers. At one time the UFT probably constituted almost one-third of the AFT. And at this time, the time of the Toronto convention, I would assume that it was about 25 percent, which is tremendous political power. Progressively we have over the years through the singular control of the Progressive Caucus in the AFT, which is a convention within a convention. You go to the Progressive Caucus and make your decision and then you go to the (inaudible) with what your decision is. We have done away with the secret ballot, instituted the roll call vote, which is obviously and transparently a mechanism to control people. I was part of the Progressive Caucus and was floor manager when that went through, and I knew from the debates inside of the Council what its purpose was, to hold people accountable on how they voted and to cut off opposition parties. In the absence of a secret ballot, you just can't develop an opposition force.

The political reality that emerged in the

Progressive Caucus is control using the roll call vote, and other mechanisms was a drive toward democratic centralism. Many false starts had been put together to develop opposition, maybe not to replace Al but to give an opportunity for an alternative voice to sway policy. But Al has put together a coalition of the major cities around the Council giving him the operating numbers. Two, with the roll call vote he can identify people who take issue with you, and through a system of patronage and organizing grant your absence or the implied threat of that can have a chilling effect on the opposition because he ends up paying a price for opposition.

Number three, we're all in the field fighting to survive. And to trash your leader is to trash yourself. And to run the kind of campaign necessary to build a constituency to challenge Al in a viable manner, we'd be writing fliers for the NEA to be used against us at the local level. So, we, people like myself who discussed the possibility of an alternative voice, held back.

And also, we've held back for another reason.

In a real sense, what goes on in the governance and the convention life of our union has very little real effect at the local level. It's not debated fiercely in the faculty lounge or at the local union meeting. The NEA has moved Al into a Devil symbol posture within the NEA. I have no doubt that 15 minutes after Al steps out of the AFT at some time in the future, the issue of merger will become immediately viable. They just can't deal with Al sitting there. And Al is not going to do it as long as he's sitting there.

So I'm sure there's a national strategy within the NEA right now, they're urging all their affiliates to be cooperative with labor. The NEA has approached the national AFL-CIO for a charter. They want into the House of Labor. And the man who probably is responsible more than anybody in America for the NEA to come to this position is standing in the door blocking them from entering. It's ridiculous for Lane Kirkland not to give a charter to the NEA, to pick up 1.5 million members, and you have a parallel union. They have them in SCIU and AFSCME and IAM and the UAW. It's not an

unusual circumstance at all. So there's tremendous irony built around Al Shanker and his political role within unity and where he stands at this given time and place.

The recognition become manifest both within the association and the federation at the same time that if you organize all the teachers in America, all of them, I think there would be about three million. And three million a majority does not make at the national level. And the federal influence on our society, maybe not so much maybe direct funding to public education, but national policies that affect our society that show up as images in the school through unemployment, which is the worse enemy of reading scores. If we had eliminated unemployment, schools would be much more successful without doing anything else but that.

At the state level like in California 80 percent of our funding comes from the state. If you organized every single teacher, you'd have 212,000, and there's 20 million people in California. There are 11 million registered voters. So, I mean, we need and they need each

other and more allies than we can muster between us to continue to have some influence on what's going on to protect ourselves from anti-public education forces within our society.

Al has become single-handedly through his own genius the leading spokesperson for education reform, and with tremendous irony again has recaptured the imagination of America on the very issues that I joined the AFT for in 1959, 1960, not so much pay -- although pay is fundamental. But what he's talking about is professionalizing our profession, giving teachers more professional voice over curriculum and teaching methodology and pride in teaching and control of the schools at the school site level, not at the district or state or national level. He's talking about teachers having power in the classroom, not in the school board or in the Congress or in the state legislature. And it's caught the imagination of teachers. Because visually that's what they're really about to begin with.

Whether or not teachers will buy into this new vision that Al has for them being teacher

managers at the school site level, my initial feedback from the schools is very mixed. Whether they want to be anything greater than teachers in terms of authority figures in the school, they are terribly excited and he has captured their imagination and they see themselves cast in at least a little different mold than they have been in the past and are maybe breaking them out of a mold where they'll have some mobility, vertical, horizontal, where he's talking about time, something we've always been arguing about.

But the important thing is he's definitely captured the imagination of the American public education and the practitioner and defining its new role. At the same time, he's contributed to the same dialogue in the labor movement at large, where you're talking about assembly line being broken up into teams instead of units of assembly and re-defining rules over quality control, not the traditional foreman/worker role on construction jobs. And I think Al has contributed significantly to that dialogue and stimulated thinking in a very dramatic way.

If we could as an organization get around to, as I indicated we're in talks with the CTA in California, they tell us quite candidly that that is the central problem in the NEA is Al Shanker as a personality and a symbol. If we can get around that -- because Al recognizes in his own public statements that we have to break out of the mold as an organization also, reach out and build alliances, the natural one is with the NEA just for openers to combine the two together.

So whether this even happens -- I think is a real breakdown. I think teachers are going to buy it, I don't think the assembly line is going to work, there's always going to be a foreman, unless you have a collective plan operation. You can modify but you can't change the essential structure because the management role pops up immediately. Teachers in an elementary school, to cite an example within our own industry, they tell me over and over again that they're a small community of people. If they're going to make decisions affecting the job status of one of the peers sitting around that lunch table who they share this

small little school with on a daily basis, they just personally cannot bring themselves to facing that person the next day if they are either making a decision that's going to affect what they are paid, what their assignment is going to be or whether they're going to lose their job. They just can't collectively see themselves in that kind of role.

They see themselves becoming advisory. But you go to a high school, and the high school teachers many of them say immediately I want a piece of that action because they don't have that tight little knit community. They don't see each other as often. They're much more like a university where they have committee structures. And they more readily see themselves being involved in a new decision making role concerning policy, hiring, firing, evaluation, promotion, reassignment, what have you. It's going to be spotty through our industry.

But the important thing is it's created a new dynamic of dialogue about what we are and how we deliver our service and how it should be done and

what's the role of administrators, what's the role of the teacher, what's the role of the communities. And out of that can't help but come a better circumstance.

The future, what's come out of this process and dialogue is unclear. For example, it's not at all certain that the teacher assumes this new role that the process will produce better output and will education improve, or will just the life of the practitioner improve. And, on the second hand, whether we can become more influential being part of a dynamic force within a larger organizational element than we are as moving from the role of a radical underground to a gadfly to a driving outside force, like a tug boat pushing a large ocean liner around. Whether Al Shanker's voice would be muted if we became part of a larger organizational structure and whether or not the voice of -- I'll carefully phrase that -- teachers with less enlightenment will become by a majority voice the political dynamic that forces the organization down to a level of political mediocrity.

On point, for example, in California now we have a concerted effort to drive from the bench Chief Justice Roseberg and three other associate justices. And we were a driving force in putting together a statewide coalition called Independent Citizens Committee to keep politics out of the court, which is a contradiction in itself, but it politically flies in some circles. And we put out a mailing to the 29,000 AFT members. And I have told the AFL-CIO I'm the first teacher to ever sit as a vice president of the AFL-CIO in California and I pulled them into this coalition. It's wrapped around a very emotional issue, the death penalty and criminal justice.

And we put out a letter to our 29,000 members. Now, there are 29,000 guaranteed college educated people employed in a public school teaching people how to think, analyze information, make rational decisions based on the alternatives they've identified, how to research things, get accurate information. We have been staggered by the return mail.

First, the good news. We've collected over

$11,000 in donations of less than $50 from our members, a tremendous response. But we've also received literally hundreds of outrageous, obscene, offensive, abusive, illiterate, emotionally scary responses, hate mail from our own membership on this issue reflecting an enormous ignorance about (A), how our government operates with the role of a court; the three branches of the government, how due process of law operates. It's really a scary kind of thing. That's within our own selection of 29,000 teachers out of the 200,000 teachers in California.

Now, if we were in the (inaudible) California is it not possible that that dominant red neck really fascist view of a democratic society might not become the dominant voice by just -- and that whether or not we succeed in November -- I don't think we can save Rose but we might be able to save two or three others, some Democrats in the process -- we have been on the complete outside as we were in 1959 in Pasadena. If we were inside we wouldn't have any influence. But by being outside of that process we can become a force.

Would not Shanker's voice have been silenced or distorted or minimized on educational reform if there had been a United Teachers of America. If we had merged in 1970, in the 1980s would Al Shanker have had the bully pulpit to speak out on education reform issues and literally pull the NEA in. As we pull the NEA into collective bargaining in the 1960s -- without organizing them and getting them to join, if we were able to turn their whole organization upside down, and Al was doing the same thing in educational reforms, educational policy in the NEA and the public schools themselves, he would have lost that voice if we had had a merged organization. So there's a legitimate discussion going on as to whether or not we are more effective continuing as a minority political voice within public education and the trade union movement than we would if we came together as a combined one. I'm not sure if the AFT has taken a policy position, but from a pragmatic standpoint we seem to argue for being outside and how we're moving in the decisions that we make.

But our policy positions: We're for national

merger and unity and change in that respect. The structural problem that we will continue to confront, though, is that the NEA has enormous membership numbers, and they're going to hold on to it. Their 1.6 million is not going to go away. By any organizing strategy we cannot blow that large number away. And yet their organization has a classic flaw in its structure in that it's not representative of the level that we deliver our service in our industry of education. It is a state dominated organization. They do not represent the teachers in Pasadena directly. The Pasadena teachers do not have representation directly. From that classroom there's not a line you can draw from the teacher in Room 103C at Pasadena High School to the policy making of the CTA. It's vertical and there are steps you cannot climb up over, so they are dominated by a nonresponsive or a very poorly responsive state dominated structure. But there are enormous numbers in insurance policies and what have you. They have democratic centralism of a different sort.

In the AFT with our historic orientation of the local being everything, the local being the school district, we have a more direct access both ways, free flow of information from the needs of the classroom teacher in the classroom and the policymakers of the AFT. Even though Al Shanker has not been in the classroom since 1960, he still gets constant, direct and vital input from people who are in the classroom that the NEA president Mary Futrell -- although she talks to classroom teachers -- does not get because the policy making, decision making mechanism breaks down and creates a gap.

The AFT evolved around the organization of local school districts in the locals, and we started with cities. So our focus has been all power to the local. The NEA has evolved along all power to the state. The NEA structure is actually much more reflective of American society in that it mirrors the federal system.

The CTA is the state of California by analogy. The CFT, however, is not the dominant force -- the dominant force in the CFT is UTLA, Los

Angeles, San Francisco Federation of Teachers, the local has been dominant. It has hurt us organizationally. We should have gone for stronger states earlier. But going for it and getting it were two different things. But that has been a weakness.

One of the reasons that we think it (inaudible) to advocate the unity of national merger strategy, the reason we support it and are not persuaded by the argument that it's better to be outside looking in than inside looking out is that the NEA itself if you watch it evolve over the past 20 years, their state associations have powerful influence within the NEA structure and convention. And one by one they are pulling the recalcitrant, retarded, troglodyte states back into the 20th century, as evidenced by Arkansas. The NEA has taken a very strong progressive position in support of the intellectual freedom advocates who are supporting teaching evolution and science. They're fighting hard for stronger certification laws and higher pay. And the NEA is playing a very progressive role through its state associations.

That will go on for the rest of the 20th century I'm sure, the statement about what's happening in the federal republic.

Arkansas is socially behind in public health, in public schools, in public libraries, in social services, in medical care, in every single aspect. Only to the strength of larger states producing more quality services are they collectively bringing pressure to bear -- I don't wish to dump on Arkansas, my mother would never forgive me. But it's an example of how the NEA as a federal organization is making progress. Whereas, our circumstance in the AFT with our interest on locals and cities do not have a vehicle for approaching our problem nearly -- we kind of depend on Manhattan Island to carry us through many of those circumstances.

The long-range view as a result of coalition building in trade unions and the possibility of merger will be the broadening of our definition of what our union is. For example, one of the really exciting things that's happening in California is that we're organizing noncertificated employees,

classified school employees into our union. And we're moving from the concept of an AFL union to a CIO union, wall to wall organizing. And the readjustments that are going on in the minds of teachers as they see themselves sitting as brothers and sisters in the union hall with the custodian and the cafeteria worker and the school bus driver discussing how the school district should be operated, and recognizing that for the first time these people have not only a vested interest but a keen interest, a personal interest in the quality of the product of the school; and that they have for a long time thought that they have been relegated second class citizenship, and they have ideas they want to articulate. And the teachers having to adjust to the reality that they have been using classified employees as school domestics and seeing themselves in a higher social class, and how contradictory that is to what they're teaching in the classroom in an egalitarian democratic society.

Projecting it on to a national scheme, I think the next natural step is that the United Teachers of America would become the United School

Employees of America or a coalition with SCIU, AFSCME and city and local school employee associations to form this type of larger organization.

The logical extension from there is to recognize that the Socialist strategy for improving society is an effective strategy for improving schools. There's no question that the quickest way to improve reading scores in Los Angeles in the inner city schools is to eliminate poverty. For years and years in Los Angeles they used to publish on an every other year basis in the newspaper the test scores of the 3rd, 6th, 8th and 11th grade students. And they would break the schools down by family median income. The correlation between high test scores and family income, regardless of whether one was brown, black, Asian or what have you, was absolute. In the golden ghetto, Windsor Elementary School, which was 96 percent black was at the 99th percentile in all their test scores. Their average income was 40 some thousand dollars for their family when $40,000 was like $70,000 today.

So we recognize if we came together as a political organization, recognizing that instead of smaller class size the public funds should be spent on a job strategy of creating employment, and see that as an educational strategy, then I think we would be rendering the highest possible service as a union to not only our members but to the communities and the industry that we represent. And the only way we're going to do that is to broaden our base of influence to include elements of society who aren't involved in decision making now through coalition politics and allied organizations to have a common purpose. And all this is as far removed from collective bargaining and negotiations and strikes but is dedicated to the same end that we set out for the time that we said collective bargaining is our vehicle.

We have been surprised over the years and sobered, we thought collective bargaining could deliver much more than it's proven able to do. We thought it was a vehicle for social change. It's not, not dramatically. It can elevate one from lower class to middle class economically. It

redistributes wealth.

We thought that it was a mechanism for asserting control over the profession. It's proven not to be, administrators still control it. They still have the same death grip on the decision making mechanism.

We thought that it would upgrade the profession as taking outside forces, the political vehicle to deal with. It can create individual job security and a stronger concept itself as an employee, but it's limited to what it can achieve. You cannot bargain with agencies that you don't represent. You can't deal with the city council or the county supervisors through the bargaining process. You have to go through the political process.

But the union is the vehicle. That can become many things. The union can become a political operation. It can become a bargaining operation. It can become a social operation. That's changed, and I think that's the direction labor is going in now.

One of the again organizational ironies that

exists, if the NEA had opted for collective bargaining in 1960 when they didn't when the George E. Brown, Jr. Act came in, we'd have been gone. In '65 with the Winton Act they didn't. They went a hesitant step and it just made us stronger.

In '76 when the law came in finally and a true collective bargaining law, the Rotta Act was adopted in California, and within the next 18 months we had over 200 collective bargaining elections across California. As a result, we've been left with 80 some bargaining agents representing 69,000 employees and are a permanent part of the political scene in California. So whatever is going to happen from this time forward is going to have to include the AFT as a political element in California. Sometimes it will reflect the national AFT and sometimes it won't, but it's definitely going to be there.

The question is often put as to why teachers can't organize themselves in the school district leveled and be independent of other school districts here, the state organization, national. Maybe these organizations are nothing more than an

extension of the ego who run them and job security for those who are involved in them. Sometimes I really get mad at the national. Those thoughts cross your mind, but you keep bringing back to the reality that the national organization certainly now is an organizing vehicle for the political agenda that we have been discussing. If it wasn't there, we'd have 50 voices descending on Washington, D.C. There would be no national voice on public educational policy. They force us into a confederation as an organization where you democratically can do a consensus and have one voice speak for that consensus and influence public policy.

And certainly in terms of national politics I think the days of sectionalism are long gone. We have to work in concert with other states. It's important of a Congressional vote that's a good vote in education from Massachusetts, it's just as important to us as a good vote from Orange County. So it gives us a national political arena to work within. The only way you can do that is through a national organization.

The same answer applies to the state, just substitute state for national, you get the same answer. Provincialism, parochialism are not influential forces in political structures.

In the absence of a merger -- and I don't see it happening until Al Shanker is not president -- I'm not casting any aspersions on Al, but that's the NEA's problem which becomes ours only because of their response to him. I think when Al is no longer president I would hope that it evolves with somebody outside of New York. I think symbolically, politically it's very important. And ideally it would be useful if it was a woman and somebody who wasn't from a major city. It would soften the image of the AFT as being a big city, Hill Street Blues, Miami Vice operation. And maybe we can go back to Mayberry, Leave It to Beaver, and project a different image to teachers of America as an organization. I think at that time merger would be possible and it would be very useful.

In the interim I don't see any change. The Progressive Caucus will still be the convention, that's the governance party of the AFT. It is

clearly supported openly, democratically and quite fairly by an overwhelming majority of the members of the locals in the AFT, and they have selected Al to be our president and he will stay there as long as he wants to. I think that's going to be for some time because of his influence in the AFL-CIO. It seems like that's almost a guaranteed prediction for the near future at least.

(END OF TAPE 3)