Tom Mooney

Part 1

This is Dan Golodner, AFT archivist, Wayne State University, Walter P. Reuther Library, interviewing Tom Mooney, April 24, 2006. Thanks for doing this Tom, I appreciate it.

A: Happy to do it.

Q: Why don't we just get started with where you were born, raised, and something about your parents.

A: I was born in Albany, New York, and that's where both my parents come from. My mother was raised in South Albany, and family connected to the famous O'Connell machine at various levels. My father, Schenectady, and then Ballston Lake, same area. My father was up and coming with a big insurance company, got transferred to Cincinnati, a quick sojourn in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, but we were in Cincinnati by about the age of 12.

My father, Tom Mooney Sr. passed away last September. He went to the Army during World War Two, fought in the Pacific theater, came back, went to a small Catholic College, Siena College, in Albany on the GI Bill. Got hired right out of college by Equitable Life, which was then the third largest insurance company, and about seventh largest corporation in America, and stayed with them 40 years. Rose pretty high, almost to the top. His last assignment was in Japan for five years, starting a brand new subsidiary for them, the first American life insurance company actually to get licensed

and do business there. As soon as he retired, the Japanese bought it. But the company, parent company by then, was under a little financial stress, but they made a lot of money on it. They made a lot of money on their investment.

My mom is Marguerite Mooney, we call her Peggy. She grew up in Albany also, and went through Catholic schools there. Didn't get to go to college, always resented it, cause her parents were, you know, middle class, and she is an only child. Could've sent her to college, but her view was they didn't think it was that important to send girls to college. She grumbled like hell about moving out here to the provinces. Had about 20 years' worth of grumbling, never really got it and didn't like the suburbs either, where we were living. She was really kind of a city girl and a night owl. She should've lived in Manhattan or Chicago or some big city, like Buenos Aires where life doesn't start till 10:00 P.M., that's her personal clock.

I went through Catholic schools in Albany, Harrisburg and Cincinnati right through high school. Then took a radical turn and went to Antioch College, was in my hippy radical days, so it was a very short list of colleges that I could imagine relating to. That one was close on the short list, but also close to home. My parents were on the rocks and I wanted to be relatively close to mom.

I liked the co-op program that they had as well, so you could actually get out in the real world. Half the time actually, in your whole college years. I majored in political science, but at the same time, getting a comprehensive social studies teaching certificate. I

actually was in, well most of my time was spent in this hybrid program between the political science department and a kind of offshoot. It wasn't really the Department of Ed. The Department of Ed I didn't find very attractive, because it was very focused on sort of the Summer Hill, or hippy free school kind of philosophy, which actually I was enamored of in high school, when I first got interested in education. That was the stuff I was reading. And high school, Catholic traditional high school seemed so repressive and straight, intellectually straitjacketed and out of date, out of touch, all those kinds of educational philosophies seemed attractive. But by the time I got to Antioch, I was becoming a little bit more left, and a little more interested in teaching in urban environments, and the stuff didn't seem to really be relevant as much to kids who needed to get basic literacy and numeracy, as well as ideology and understanding of the political world they lived in. I was really lucky actually, because this was a very, relatively brief moment in time where this partnership between a really skilled teacher and teacher-educator, a guy who ended up being my advisor in the political science department was just kind of getting up and running.

It was called Praxis, it was obviously designed to marry political theory and practice in terms of teaching. We worked in teams. We would spend five hours developing a 40 minute lesson plan. We used what we called then 'Freire Approach' to the pedagogy, which made it more commonly -- go back in time, call it the Socratic approach -- kind of inquiry based teaching and seminars, and trying to draw on, I guess what Freire added to that was trying to draw on, in a multicultural environment that we're in here today, and we're teaching, and then drawing on the background of kids, and building on what they

do know, in order to link them to knowledge and information that they should know, or that you'd like them to know, or that they might find useful.

Q: So instead of teaching let's say the white Founding Fathers, which there's no relation to urban kids really understanding --

A: No, no, that's not the point. It's not that you didn't teach them, certainly I didn't then, and don't believe in that now, the kids need a common cultural backdrop of the society they're living in, and they certainly need to know the political history of their country, which would include those guys. But not exclusively those guys. Not just the white Founding Fathers. It's a very shallow and distorted version of history that we traditionally taught, only talked about those guys. Not who was really doing the work, who was really fighting the battles on the battlefield. Who were the slaves, and a lot of this fighting was over in a couple of wars. You have to paint a more holistic picture of a society if you want kids to understand it. Certainly if you want them to understand their place in it, given that they are not descended directly from the Daughters of the American Revolution. But not that they shouldn't know those things as well.

I actually learned some pretty good and powerful teaching methods. That doesn't mean that I learned how to manage an inner city classroom, and deal with the bureaucracy of the school, and the school system, and I certainly had, like most people, had to struggle with all that, but I did have a pretty good foundation actually, trying to gauge kids, and engage in interesting lessons.

As well as getting exposed to a very wide range of political thought at Antioch, the entire spectrum of the left, from pretty much just countercultural to any kind of sect you could want to join. If you wanted to be in a Marxist-Leninist-lesbian--vegetarian study group or caucus, no problem, it was there. (laughter)

Q: What kind of groups were you with?

A: I never joined anything cause it just seemed like a bad idea. None of them really seemed to have all the answers, or be all that together. I was just leery of joining something that you might regret later having joined. The closest I got was probably the New American Movement, which later merged with the Michael Harrington version of the wing of the old Socialist Party. But I never even joined that. A lot of my friends were in that. And we were also in this group that worked around this Praxis program, to learn how to teach politics in an engaging way. I guess to some extent, what would you call it? What would you have called that group's politics? I don't know, some kind of a post-Maoism. I don't know, it was certainly anti-revisionist in the sense of the Communist Party crowd. But we weren't really easily niched.

Frankly, cause this advisor that was our political science professor in general, he was definitely Marxist, but he was of a very interesting, independent sort, who taught and who was more interested in Marx as a social historian than as an economist, and certainly he was very disdainful of Marx as a politician, which history shows he was not much of a politician. But he was also into Marcosa, and he was into Gramsci, an Italian sort of anarchist labor movement. Who else did we have to read? Lukacs, who was this Hungarian Marxist political scientist who was really, really dense to get through. But

what I mostly learned from him was social analysis, and texts that were about deconstructing a society, and how it works, and how it fits together. By marrying the economics to the politics, and the sociology to the cultural and religious, that was the real valuable stuff I got out of Marx, but also other authors that he exposed us to.

I sort of floated through a range of political circles without ever committing or joining one. Meeting people years later who were in other Antioch little political self-study groups or factions, I would say, yeah, our cult -- sect, sorry, our sect thought your sect was extremely sectarian. (laughter) But that was Antioch in the '70s. There was a lot of great professors, and a lot of great stimulation. So no regrets.

I got out of there fast, not because I didn't like it, but because I was anxious to get out in the real world and make a living, in my family there was a real strong work ethic. You were constantly told about how your grandfather worked two jobs and ran the farm and did the heavy housework. Stuff like that. Or you would constantly get, "While you're resting, I want you to sweep the garage." So I just really wanted to get out there and save the world, I guess. That was the times we were in. I got out of there in three years, after having finished high school in three years.

Q: Three years of high school?

A: Yeah, which means I started teaching at 20. And I pretty much went on the co-ops I did, various kind of political stints, including two different stints of, they weren't formal student teaching, but they were interns -- well, actually one of course did -- kind of my

student teaching. The other was just kind of an informal internship at a school. Both were alternative schools. Both were in Cincinnati. I also did a stint with United Farm Workers, in basically volunteer where they paid your rent, and literally $5 a week spending money.

Q: Was that in Ohio?

A: That was also in Cincinnati as well around Yellow Springs and surrounding towns around Antioch. So I stayed kind of close to home. Again, partly for family reasons, partly cause I wanted to work my way into the work world, and into the political world. I wanted to maintain contacts, and develop contacts. That did sort of pay off in terms of things I was able to do fairly quickly out of college.

Q: This work with UFW, was that your first exposure to a labor union?

A: It was, other than my parents, not just my parents, but my parents' generation on both sides of the family, and even my grandparents, my grandparents on both sides of the family had lost medium sized businesses during the Depression. They did sort of professional stuff. I don't mean doctor or lawyer, but more business and commercial stuff. Previous generation had been skilled craftspeople, railroads, construction, a lot of railroad in Central New York. I was raised with Democratic politics, definitely, and basically liberal Democratic politics, a real strong affinity to Roosevelt and the New Deal, Kennedys in the '60s, that was our being Irish-Catholic, that was really big development, obviously. But not a lot of labor. Labor was certainly a good part of the Democratic coalition, and unions are good, we need them. But there wasn't a lot of real exposure to the labor movement.

The Farm Workers was my first real involvement. It came through sort of Catholic social action stuff, as opposed to directly a desire to get involved in unions. I started doing the teaching with the notion that I'm going to get real involved in the union, and that's going to be the instrument for trying to change education and change the world and everything. It was more interesting in teaching as a political activity in and of itself. The Farm Workers was a distinct strand, and I got real involved in that in high school, actually. And this does have a real direct bearing on how I approached issues in bargaining, and as a leader of the teacher's union much later. I got real involved in this in high school as a result of one of our classes. No, was it a class? I was active in the world affairs club. I think it might have been in a world affairs club forum meeting, somebody representing the UFW's grape boycott at the time, around 1970 or '69 maybe even, came to talk. This was a farm worker from California. They were sent out far and wide to various cities to help stimulate and organize support for these boycotts. There were also some local activists, including a Catholic priest who was sort of leading the local efforts.

So we had this speaker, we didn't really know quite how to follow up, who were the contacts, and what the network was. So I don't know who directed us this way, but we ended up meeting with the head of the Central Labor Council. Here is a bunch of high school kids from a Catholic high school in the district on the edge of the city, and a lot of suburbs and rural areas, with huge attendance there and we go downtown and meet with Bill Sheehan, who's a fabulous guy, got to know him much better later as a labor activist, and teacher union leader. He gave us the overview of what was going on with the UFW, and the grape boycott, and put us in touch with people who were actually working on the

boycott. I got real involved in that. Our little high school had an active boycott committee that had people out every week, often in peak periods of the campaign, multiple times per week at local supermarkets. We had a pretty steady group. This corresponded somewhat to a social network of sort ranging from the political activists to the merely countercultural types in this Catholic high school, which was a distinct minority.

We had a good time. We had a great impact. We would go every weekend into the university district, which was real exciting. To have the actually weekly meeting of the citywide boycott committee, and learned a lot about strategy and tactics. Got involved in the discussions about what was going to be most effective. Spent a lot of time picketing stores where no one gave a shit about the farm workers, because they had picked the wrong target once in a while. But most of the time, they were very smart. We picked targets in working class neighborhoods, racially integrated neighborhoods where you got tremendous support. This was a huge object lesson, watched a lot of people turn away from stores because we were telling them about either the oppression of the farm workers, and or how it affected them as consumers, because of the pesticides. And herein lies a major, in fact, we found especially to the extent the more we got out into the middle class and suburban areas you know from where they knocked the grapes off the shelves in certain stores, we were now working our way out into more fringe or suburban type areas, where it's a tougher sell to have solidarity with the grape workers, be a, big value in and of itself. So we were coached by the leaders of the citywide boycott committee to

focus more on the pesticides, and the common ground between the workers and the consumers.

That became sort of an instinctive thing to do, as I was working on challenges of how to get stuff the teachers wanted when they didn't really want to strike to get it. So we'll get to that later. But it didn't dawn on me at the time, that I was imitating that farm worker tactic until an interview like this with a reporter asking background questions. It suddenly dawned on me, that hey, that's where I got that notion from. It just became kind of instinctive, because I spent so many hours out in front of supermarkets, pitching that line. So that was very influential.

I also did student rights organizing in high school, around everything from the right to free speech stuff, to having a say in school governance or curriculum, you know, the usual stuff at that time. So I went back in time to -- and then in college, I picked up, one of my co-ops was a six month stint, working for the boycott committee in Cincinnati.

Q: Excellent. So you had various exposures to unionism, student rights, and teacher rights.

A: Yeah, and unionism as a high moral and social calling, as well as just a trades union.

Q: Is this the time when you're going to become a substitute teacher?

A: Well, I got out of college, and I actually finished in September, or finished in summer, because it was a year round. So I finished it in the summer of '74. They wouldn't issue a diploma until spring, but I'd finished all the course requirements. So I was able to get -- I don't know whether it was a temporary or maybe a whole -- a regular certificate based on a letter from the college, and went to the personnel office. I only applied to Cincinnati

public, cause that's where I wanted to move in. Let's see, I guess it was maybe November they started calling me to sub. It was about the time we did all the paperwork and stuff. And subbing is hell of course, but I didn't do that for very long. I did some subbing, it was of course, all inner city.

Then a position opened up at Bloom Junior High, in the west end of Cincinnati, one of the oldest and poorest by then neighborhoods. Beautiful 1915 building, big, high windows, a rooftop play area, which was no longer in use at the time, at least not for instruction. (laughter) And the reason it had a rooftop play area was because it was in the inner city at a time when inner city was like old time. This was a huge meat packing town, so right in the area were these big meat packing plants, and you know, cows and bulls and stuff running loose. And right next to the school was Millionaires Row, where meat packers and brewers and other wealthy folks lived, in these Italian mini-mansions, beautiful houses, some of which have now been restored. Kids went home for lunch. There was no cafeteria, because kids in the old days went home for lunch. So now the cafeteria was a wide place in the hall, and we had to run four shifts to feed the kids. But you know, the thing had swimming pools built in 1915, and it had two sets, boys and girls swimming pool, which sometimes were in use, and sometimes not. Cause there was no money for maintenance and capital. It was still a neighborhood school. Kids walked, mostly walked to school, and was mostly projects. This was a neighborhood that once had 80,000 people in it. It's now maybe got, I don't know, if it has 8,000 maybe, 10 maybe. Big chunks of it were torn down altogether, and it's now sort of light industry and warehousing sort of stuff. Then an interstate highway was plowed through and tore

down a bunch of it. And then new projects were built. There's several generations of projects. We're now into tearing them down. But even in, this is 1975, most of the kids walked to school, either from the old brownstones and tenements, or from projects.

That was neat because they were typically way behind academically, didn't have good study habits, would challenge you right to the wall in terms of behavior, if you let them get away with it, but really were mostly nice kids that were just going to get away with as much as I let them get away with. But it was about you learning how to figure out what the right prompts are, and how to engage them, and how to discipline them and not take the shit. But that takes a while. They didn't really teach us that in college. You know, in most cases unfortunately they still don't.

But the nice thing was, if you called parents, you got back in those days, and if you couldn't backing out of a parent, sometimes you'd find that the parent wasn't responding, or the parent was responding and sounded very concerned, but nothing happened. Then you figured out, that you're pushing a button that's not connected to anything, and you've got to find who's really running this. In those days though, there was more likely to still be a grandma who was up from the Deep South, who was from the country, in other words, and was not about tolerating bad behavior on the part of children and didn't see that as necessary at all. And if it was happening, it was because somebody was letting it. It wasn't going to be on her watch. So if you found grandma, you were gold, even if the parents weren't all that in charge or together. Sometimes, you in fact got a little too much support, as you'd call home, you could hear the screams at the other end of the phone, or

when the kid was getting whipped, or the kid would come in the next day limping. But you would definitely get, and you'd feel bad, but you'd definitely get some backup most of the time.

The school was pretty much out of control though, cause the principal was real weak, and didn't come out of his classroom until about third bell. No wrong. This was a school where he would make his rounds at first bell, before anybody had woken up. And then you'd never see him the rest of the day. The rest of the day things would slowly and steadily deteriorate. There were two assistant principals that were trying to keep it together.

So that was interesting. I mean, it was about me trying to put some of these skills and lesson planning engagement to work, but having to learn how to manage, to just manage kids and manage all the bureaucracy you're reporting and everything you've got to do.

Q: Was this all on you just discovering yourself, how to manage a classroom?

A: Yes, pretty much, that and the kids' teach you. The kids don't really want the class to be out of control, so when you keep them after school, they will tell you. I think it was very explicit, "Mr. Mooney, when so and so did this, here's what you should've done. Now, this one will not stay for detention, so what you've got to do is this." And the really interesting thing, and this was a real lesson to me, I took over a classroom mid-year, which is always really hard. And they were used to a certain routine. The person I took

over from was a white, West Side then was the German and some Irish and some other ethnic groups. Very Catholic, very white. He was a classic West Side German. I was teaching American history and black culture. This man left me a collection of materials to teach black history and black culture that hadn't I have seen the like of since in the schools. OK, I had a certain stereotype, and here I was with boots, long hair, hippy radical, from the East Side of town, thinking those West Side Catholics, that was a conservative, racist part of town. And it was, in many ways. But this guy did not fit the stereotype.

There were also a lot of white teachers from the West Side that had been just transferred there the year before, under a faculty deseg policy. The district was embroiled in deseg litigation then. To sort of take the heat off, or buy some time, they didn't want to desegregate the kids, but they went ahead and integrated the faculties, made it by just massive transferring people around. You had three groups of people. You had these white teachers who'd just gotten there from the West Side, which were then, not so today, but then, kind of white middle class or upper working class type of neighborhoods in shell shock, totally. You had older black school teachers, and Cincinnati has a very old black middle class. You had very professional, very stern, very middle class cultured kind of people, who frankly also kind of looked down on these poor ghetto kids. Then you had younger black teachers who were kind of with it, and I learned a lot from a couple of them especially. And they tended to be the strongest union members too.

But it was a very strange environment, it was very strange. There were three or four different places where people ate lunch. The faculty was very fractured. But like I said, this teacher I inherited from kind of… I grouped him with these other West Side white teachers who couldn't deal with the where they were. No, he had the kids under control, he had a real good curriculum going on, and so naturally, you're taking it on mid-year, that's all I heard. "Mr. Orangemeyer would've done this. Now usually on Monday, Mr. Orangemeyer does this. When Johnny did such and such, this is what Mr. Orangemeyer would do." So eventually -- it's hard to get control back once you lost it. So when September started, a new year, you apply the lessons. Unfortunately, the limitations of course what they're teaching is what they know, which included corporal punishment, in that time, at that place. Which included not necessarily all the best pedagogical practices, but it was what they were used to, to sort of get them to kind of -- to come to terms, you had to do some of that. So that was fun.

The first thing I had to do was learn the language, the dialect to be perfectly honest. They would sit there and talk, and I honestly didn't understand what they were saying. But I was on the positive side, I was fascinated by it, because I was very interested in dialects of all sorts, and I was very interested in the culture and the kids I was dealing with. I'd learned all this theory stuff, as well as my own natural inclinations, I guess, or family inclinations. So I learned it fast, but at first I actually had to go to some of the teachers and say what, you know, what does this mean? (laughter) Sometimes it wasn't appropriate language for the classroom, so they would like, play it off. But mostly I would get translations. I really liked the kids. I really enjoy the kids, even when they

were getting the better of me some days. I always liked them. And I liked being in a neighborhood school.

So then by the end of the year, I got elected building rep. There were some political issues that rose, that I guess I took a stand on within the building.

Q: So basically you went to a meeting, actually ask the question, and you get elected?

A: Pretty much. Yeah, nobody was all that anxious. They tried to make us sign a loyalty oath. There were some other strong union people in the school, but if this young, eager guy is willing to do it, fine. So I got elected building rep, and then immediately got surplused, not because of getting elected building rep, just because, there were staff changes. Surplus or excess meaning involuntarily got transferred out, got to find a new school.

Q: Was this with the federation, or of the association?

A: At that time, the association was the bargaining agent. So do you want a little bit of that, how that happened?

Q: Sure.

A: We had a local in Cincinnati chartered, and like a lot of the urbans and other locals in Ohio, chartered during the Depression. That local lasted until the early '50s. I actually commissioned, when I became local president later, some research on it. I got somebody to do a history master's paper on the history of this other local, and he did a bunch of oral history, and somewhere the tapes still exist. You should have those.

Q: I think I do but I don’t think so.

A: We wrote some articles in our paper based on, our local paper based on the research. It was fascinating. But then the local was chartered again in '64. The typical thing in those days, mostly high school teachers, mostly males that started it. They went to Chicago, to AFT headquarters, and met with the leaders at that time. They worked pretty fast, and by '68, they went on strike. It was the second, as far as I can make out, it was the second teacher union strike in the state. The first one was in Youngstown in '66. I believe we were second in '68. It was the federation, which was the minority, but by a lot at the time, that called the strike.

Oral history has it we closed about half the schools, with the support of other unions. That kind of solidarity was much stronger in those days, in terms of AFSCME, operating engineers, Teamsters not delivering stuff, letter carriers not delivering stuff. But the majority of the teachers at that time were still in the association, which was in no way, shape or form a union, you know, at that point. The strike lasted, I think a week. Our president went to jail. There was injunctions. Strikes were illegal. There was no bargaining law. The only thing there was was about a two paragraph thing called the Ferguson Act, that says if you strike, you can get fired. Using that just the fact that it was illegal, they didn't really fire masses of people very often, but they would go get injunctions, and impose fines. So the president went to jail. There's great photos of him, of his kids having a vigil outside of jail. This was a guy who had a really good knack for the media, and good inspirational leader. An Irish Catholic that at that time -- he ended up having 15, maybe even 16 kids. So a lot of them were outside the jail on vigil, kind of like the Eadie Shanker picture outside the jail. It's a really good one.

Anyway, the point is that the principle demand was collective bargaining. We wanted an election to select a bargaining agent. Again, the oral history is that they agreed to, well, there's all sorts of maneuvering going on during the strike. They agreed to have an election to happen right away, and we had to decide if go back to work to vote, or stay out. They stayed out during the election. This may have been a deliberate ploy because we knew we weren't going to win. That's the catch. So sure enough, the association wins the first election. The district insists that the federation also come to the table, cause after all, we're the ones that went on strike. What's the point of having a deal with the association if we're not going to honor it? Things weren't firm then, again, there was no bargaining framework for exclusive agencies, etc, etc. So we're at the tables, the best contract the association ever got. That I know, cause I've read them all. There are things in there that are lost the next time, when you lost more the time after that. By that point, there's now a framework. There's at least a voluntarily agreement as to how we do recognition elections and each time there was one, the ground rules of the agreement got changed some, but there was at least beginning to be precedent. So we petitioned under the terms of the first agreement for an election. We petitioned and got another election in '71, and came very close. We came very close in the second one. In '74, we lost a little ground, but still came pretty close.

Then the association blew it in a couple of major ways. One, is they fractured internally. Then the president decided to run for another term, even though she was term limited, and pushed through constitutional amendment that was disputed. That's all I can

remember for sure, as to whether it was validly, properly voted on. Second, this massive desegregation of faculty transfers occurred, and they staged their one strike, primarily in protest of that. It lasted three days. They went out three days before the Easter Break, which was kind of dumb, cause it took all the wind out of your sails then. And they went back to work, and the sense was they didn't get anything. It was sort of a flop. We didn't honor it, that left, that's a tough decision, but that leaves bad blood for years. There was a long, long period, in other words, of two organizations, like in a lot of cities at that time.

In '76, we finally won bargaining rights by a decisive margin, in part because of their somewhat collapse in the eyes of the teachers and internal splits. So I come in, in other words, while the union is in its run up to finally getting bargaining rights, and I joined the federation, or I probably would've just on general inclination of this was the real union. You know, getting newsletters, I liked the tone, the spirit. It was as appropriate to a minority trying to become a majority, and it was A, more liberal, more progressive. It was strongly and explicitly in support of the deseg suit that was pending. It seemed to be very inclusive, you know, come around and you can get involved, which proved to be the case. It was feisty, it was whistleblower like some of it was whistleblower type stuff. Giving voice to teachers' frustrations about the way the system worked, not just about salaries or benefits or whatever. It was an easy decision of which to join. I didn't get outside of my building, except much of that first year, I got to be building rep by the end of the year and got surplused.

I went to another very interesting school, a school that had just opened in 1970, a middle school that was spun off from the high school across the street, which was a much older school. The result of that was the less senior teachers got moved over to the middle school, so it was a very feisty group. It was a very strong union school. It was much more cohesive than Bloom. There were just a handful of association members. I wasn't the union leader by any means. There were other people already established or active in the union, and I was happy to be a follower and help out and provide whatever little tactical suggestions I could for my other activist background.

As a place to teach, it was also in some ways better and in some ways worse. It was much larger territory -- kids rode a bus, so it wasn't like a neighborhood school. But you still got pretty much parent support, and particularly if you were smart enough to get to figure out who's in charge of this family, it might not be mom, it might not be dad, it might be dad wasn't there every day, but he was in fact the disciplinarian. You just had to figure out what was going on. Kids would not give you phone numbers. Some didn't have phones, but mostly they did, but they wouldn't give them to or the right number, or even the right address, or they moved a lot so you couldn't catch up with them. Especially if they were acting up and they knew it, they didn't want you to find the parents. So my best trick was you got to get to grandma how do you do it? I came up with a brilliant idea. I'm sure lots of people have done this, or some people who just because they're connected to the community would just know it, but from coming more as an outsider, I said, "Where do you go to church?" The kids -- and unlike our generation, these kids would rat each other out in a second. I mean, we were tight.

That's the other trick to teaching, is you know that unfortunately the kids will rat each other out. It's not necessarily behavior you want to encourage, but you got to do what you got to do. Such and such Baptist. OK, the other thing I figured out is you called the church on Saturday, you get the church secretary. You can't call on Sunday, they're all busy. During the week, there may not be anybody there. The preacher's too busy, but you get the secretary. "Hi, I'm so and so, Mr. Mooney, Crest Hill, so and so's teacher. Hello, how are you, blah blah blah. I'm looking to try to find -- I understand his family goes to church here. I'm looking for -- to try and get in touch with his grandma. You wouldn't happen to have her number?" "I can't give you out Mrs. So and so's number." I said "I know, I'm sure that's the case, but boy, he sure is acting up in class." "Oh, is that right? Well, what's going on?" So it's like mm-hmm, here's the number, you know. (laughter) So next day, the kid goes, "How'd you get my grandma's number?" Didn't have a lot of trouble out of that kid after that. You have to learn those tricks.

I like teaching. I like a lot of the good teachers, some bad teachers. You would put me in the middle struggling to try to get there. After a couple of more years, I think I was getting pretty good. But a strong union school, very active and militant. In fact, probably one of the seminal episodes, really, of the union's sort of march to bargaining rights was at this school, we had a wildcat strike. We were fired up, we were ready. We were acting like we were the bargaining agent at this school, right? Cause again, there's no real legal framework at this time anyway. And there were very few association members. We were involved in the citywide union activity as well.

But one day, the principal, not a bad guy, called in a teacher who was a union member for a disciplinary conference. So we knew he needed to have somebody with him. We'd been to enough workshops to know the basics. We went, it wasn't me, it was probably the building rep, who approached the principal and said we want somebody in with this teacher. And the principal said no. The question of having an association rep there, I don't think that even really came up. Because it was clear that they didn't represent him, and they didn't represent the majority. So we figured we had to do something. This is where I think I might have provided a little tactical advice to those folks who were the leaders that others would follow. So we wanted to essentially put down the tools. We knew we couldn't walk out with those kids in the building. And that was the dilemma. We wanted to do something strong, but what was it, cause we couldn't just walk away from the kids. So we brought all the kids to the auditorium. So it was essentially a sitdown wildcat strike, we brought the kids all out to the auditorium and we sat them down, and they're like what the hell's going on? Is there going to be a movie, a speaker, whatever? We just told them, so we had somebody come up to the mic and told them, "We're having a little disagreement with the principal, and we just needed to stop teaching for a little while. We'll get it worked out." They're like yeah! (laughter)

Q: I bet the kids loved that.

A: They were pretty good, they were curious about what was going on, you know.

Q: Did you explain it to them, the fundamentals?

A: I don't think we did. I think we made a judgement we didn't want to drag them into the middle of it; start naming names it would get messy. We just told them it was -- we let them know it was a labor dispute that was it. So somebody went and dealt with the

principal. My assignment was to call the union headquarters, and let the president of the local know that we were on strike. Well I'm naïve, I'm thinking he's going to be rushing right out there, and he's going to be like what can I do to help? Should I call the press? I don't know, whatever. I didn't know what you were supposed to do next, but you know, I figured he was supposed to know that, right? He was freaked out, "You shouldn't be doing that, it's not legal," I don't know, I can't remember what he said exactly. But I clearly got the impression of a weak, somebody who was not up to the battle that we probably needed to engage in. So I just reported that back, and they go -- they went yeah, that figures. (laughter) We didn't really need him that day a whole lot anyway. I had a second later experience, when I was local president with a wildcat, but I had nothing to do with organizing. But it was interesting, it was a health and safety wildcat, actually.

So that was a seminal experience. That would've been getting to be, sometime during the '75-6 school year. In the meantime, I started going in Saturdays and volunteering, or after school and volunteering at the union office, and it was a period where if you came around a couple of Saturdays, you'd be chairing a committee, and I got to be an area coordinator, which really was where I learned about organizing. In the buildup to the bargaining election, I was an area coordinator, and by this time as it gets closer to the election, there's a lot of AFT staff or borrowed staff in town. And I don't know if I knew all this then, but I knew since that basically, the AFT drove a hard bargain in that campaign, because they didn't have a lot of confidence in the local president either, and they didn't intend to interfere in stuff we didn't know much about. So they struck a hard bargain that we're going to send in one of our best people, we've got to finally deliver this

local, things look ripe, but you've got to get out of the way. In other word, it had to be the nat rep is in charge of the campaign.

Q: So they sent a nat rep to assist --

A: Oh yeah, they had always given a lot of help, I think, in past elections, but this one they were insisting on control, and that was good. Now, our second vice president, director of organization local was fabulous. She had great organizational skills and instincts in and of herself, but she also knew enough to work with the nat rep, and take direction when needed. But she's the one who really motivated and worked with us, you know, month in and month out. She's a sweetheart she made it fun, you know, it was a lot of social life. She tried to hook people up, play matchmaker. You've got to have that social cohesion. This is Sharon Cole who later married John Cole. And went down to be his director of organization. But she was our key person in this formative period.

So anyway, I got downtown. I got where I used to teach and the schools in that area. I lived up on the hill near the university, and I could walk over to the park, look down on all my schools, I thought that was so cool. This was my territory. (laughter) And it was all pretty much West End. There's not that many schools there now, but I think it was West End and some Over-the-Ryan Schools, which was the other old historic neighborhood that gets so much bad press these days. I figured this was going to be relatively easy. This is the inner city. One, the teaching conditions are more difficult. People might feel more need for representation. The folks who get there tend to be the low seniority people, or these folks that have been transferred down there and don't even like being there. I figured it's going to be easy, it wasn't that easy. Well actually, it

wasn't that it was hard so much. I thought it would be better. I thought these would be strong union schools already. No. Mostly they weren't. Some of them didn't even have a building rep. It was odd. I don't really know why this is accepted. I think part of it is that a lot of the teachers that have been there before the transfers were the older black school teachers who were very association, and who were very into union as a profession, this is a profession, I'm a professional. And you know, my husband might need a union, or my daddy might have been in a union. Nothing wrong with that, but that's not, you know --

Q: Teacher doesn't do it.

A: That's not what teachers do. They were very leery of this hippy radical kid coming around, telling them what they ought to do. But I learned a lot from them too. It was a lot of work, but we got it together. It was ripe actually, just it was ready, but the territory hadn't been worked.

Q: You had to do a lot of legwork.

A: Yeah, I had to do a lot cold calling, a lot of calling through lists to find a building rep, to have enough conversations with enough people to figure out who I would want to be the building rep, and then call them back and say hey, you know, we really need somebody, would you do it? But it was cold calls. It was like, my daddy going out knocking on doors, selling insurance. So that was my first real organizing stint.

Under Sharon's tutelage whip we made progress. Then came the bargain election, and we won it by a big margin. A lot of, again, a lot of loan staff, a lot of people helping. Learned a lot from folks from different locals that were there, as well as from nat reps.

Then we went right into getting ready to bargain. The school board kind of threw down the gauntlet right away. We won this election in December of '76. The association's contract had been negotiated through '77, because they thought that would be an incentive to keep them in. And they had 3% raise that was in that contract due to be paid in January '77. The board said, "We ain't paying it." You all voted in a different union. We have a contract with this union. You voted a different union. You got to negotiate from scratch. Well that was A, to try to make us look bad, B, try to just throw down the gauntlet, and it certainly did. It was like OK, you voted in -- you think you voted in a more militant union, let's see how militant you are. You know, that was basically what it was about. This is a very non-union town. This is an old industrial town, it's like a company town. Not where it's just one company, but sort of a multi-company company town, in terms of its politics and the way it's run. Most of these industries were non-union. And if they didn't have union in their factory, they sure didn't plan on having on in their schools, if they could prevent it. Getting to set a bad example for their future workers. It was that kind of mentality, that kind of town in those days. It hasn't changed that much. So they were ready to take us on. Well the school board were all corporate lawyers that represented the local ruling class, worked for their companies.

So then I volunteered for the bargaining committee. I was still an area coordinator. I volunteered for the bargaining committee, and we spent all of Christmas break, and a whole bunch before and after drawing up an absolute manifesto for transforming public education in Cincinnati, voice on everything. Not just money, and it was a very broad vision. I think this is fairly typical too, when teachers first unionize. I would say literally

my gut would say about 50% of what was really fueling this drive at this point was money, or just economic status, and about half of it was not having any voice in anything, and being treated like peons instead of professionals. I really do think that was about 50-50. But we were poor. We were the working poor at that point.

Q: What was the average salary?

A: I have no clue what the average was. I started in '75. My first contract, $8,700. That, lots of people could top that, especially in those days. A lot of people, "We are starting at $5,200, you know, [$33,000 over], or hell, $6,200 for not much more than that. The big thing though, if you think about the times. High inflation time period, right? Vietnam War fueling inflation. It took me five years to break $10,000. That's really a more relevant statistic in a way. And a whole generation, lots of new teaches came in the '70s, a generation that was influenced by other movements going on at the time. If they hadn't been involved, at least it was part of the backdrop, that if you have a grievance or you're pissed off about something you organize and you do something about it. But it was a time when you couldn't…there was no such thing as FHA 5% mortgages that our parents bought houses on. The only houses we could afford, unless you had other means, or parents were helping, you were talking about rehabbing houses in the inner city. That's where my generation of teachers we're either renters or buying pretty beat up houses somewhere in the inner city and fixing them up.

So anyway, where the gauntlet has been thrown down, we formulated this manifesto to transform the schools in the form of our contract demands, then Bob Bates comes in, and of course, his first assignment is to shape up our demands. Let's get a little bit real. Well,

we resisted pretty hard. And by the way, I learned a ton from him, tremendous respect for Bob. But you know, we did push back, we said we really want to keep this one or that one. But he shaped it up somewhat, the package. He was supposed to be our chief negotiator, and get us through the overall fight for the first contract. Once again, the local president reverted to form and got in the way a lot, especially as things got tough.

But in the meantime, this was exciting for me. Then I got, after being on the bargaining committee, and being active, and hopefully helpful in some ways, I actually got picked to be on the bargaining team. I went to the table. I was, I guess, the Young Turk representative, so to speak. At this point, I'm what, 22 maybe.

Q: Jeez, really Young Turk.

A: So that was a hell of an experience. Then we bargained for a few months, and we went on strike. I'm now still an area coordinator, turned into once we go on strike; they called us strike captains, area strike captains. And on the bargaining team. So this was real and teaching full time so this was pretty intense, but fun. I got a new territory as an area coordinator around the first of the year, as we were kind of building up toward what at least most of us thought we were going to have to strike. And this was West Side. We're other than the ones who'd been transferred into the inner city for deseg, it was still pretty much conservative, white, well relatively speaking conservative white teachers association, dominating membership. Although by this time, after all these wars, a whole lot of people are not members of anything. They're like a plague on both your houses. As I get in there to organize to support the bargaining team, and later to support the strike, I got the black teachers that had been transferred out for deseg, the music teacher,

the art teacher, probably the phys ed teacher. Maybe a couple of other oddballs. It was tough. We did not have a majority of people in these schools ready to support the union. I mean, and remember, there's association members, who are feeling righteous about you didn't support our strike. Fuck you. You think you're so militant, go and be militant. It was a split. That was definitely the downside of those long years of battling for representation rights.

But we got to April. We couldn't budge them. Basically they were offering us nothing on nothing; language, money, anything. So we pretty much had to strike, and we did. We claimed we had 60% out, but it was more like 50 at the beginning. God knows by the end, because there began to be a trickle back to work. Not a huge flow, but a trickle. And we were out for four weeks. So this was the epic Cincinnati strike.

We had a long bout of warm, sunny spring weather. We all got sunburned out there on the picket line. I was running back and forth between the bargaining table and checking on my schools, and bolstering the lines. Of course, we sent people from strong schools to help picket at the weaker schools. We had a couple of wild characters from Philly out working with us at that time, running around West Side schools, acting a little crazy. I mean, acting I suppose normal by East Coast union standards, but it was a little -- some of it might have been counterproductive. Ted Kirsch was one of the people, not in the strike, he was there during the run up to the bargaining election campaign. He was great. A couple other characters from Philly were there during the strike that they loaned us.

So that was a tumultuous, ugly thing. You can imagine what it does to a city, especially at that time. Everybody was freaked out. The mayor was a labor mayor, a mayor that came out of dairy worker's union. It was kind of a political, part of a political dynasty family, the Lukens, who's nephew is the most recent, not current, but recent mayor. His father was a city council member, state rep, and then Congressman for a long time. I'm sorry, his brother of this mayor at the time, was also city council member, later became a long serving Congressman. Anyway, the labor mayor came out of the milk drivers, which had been part of the Teamsters. He bucked the Hoffa people, had to hire bodyguards, had goons following around. I mean, he was a tough son of a bitch, and we always thought he was on our side. But now he's mayor, and his damned schools are closed or disrupted.

We did not close the schools in general. We severely disrupted some, to all the way from a handful of subs that don't know what they're doing, to schools that were maybe 25% of the teachers were out, and the rest of the regular teachers were in. Whole spectrum. But his priority was to get us back to work. I remember one meeting with the bargaining team, and Bob Bates in his office, where he basically screamed at us and he has some little deal to offer. I basically thought it was bullshit, and so did most of the team. So we were shocked to find -- we were kind of out there without a lot of support from the establishment.

Q: Did you get support from the community and other unions?

A: You know, we were following a fairly traditional union path, and even my thinking hadn't really been broadened that much. I don't remember a whole lot of real serious

work at building community support before we went out, or it was more like getting labor support was of course important, but it was a little too narrow of a view of what you needed to do to win.

But in the end, and of course, the other thing is the school district is in fact, financially very hard pressed. This was a very tough time financially, the whole '70s really. The state had just put in, in '74 this Ohio version of Proposition 13, -- we weren't yet feeling the full effects of it, but we were pretty broke. The way it works is still -- it was law then, and later they put it in the constitution. You pass a levee, which before this proposition, you'd pass a tax rate. You'd pass a levee of six mills for schools. If you're property value went up, you'd pay six mills on the new value. This is again a high inflation time, so this is what Proposition 13 was reacting to. Ever since '74, you pass a levee to make say, six mills on the ballot, but in reality, what you're passing, approving is the dollars that six mills brings in now. It will never bring in more dollars. So every few years you have to go back to get another levee just to adjust to revenues for inflation, much less if you want to need any new challenges or do anything different.

So that was starting to take hold. But also, the district had not passed a levee in years. It was partly about controversies over deseg, the peak of enrollment having passed, and beginning to have to downsize and close schools. The baby boom was over and so that's always very divisive. And then labor strikes also played into some people's perceptions; we're not sending them more money until they calm down or something. And they're not a very strong union town.

So we were kind of broke, point being that we settled after 20 days, calendar month for one time 6% raise, three year contract, one time 6% raise. Reopeners, economic reopeners for the second or third year, neither of which was successful or got to conclusion. So we got a 6% raise for three years. We did get the building blocks of a contract, and certainly had much better language on sort of working conditions and rights and stuff, than the prior association contract. And we got a

End of Audiofile #1

Tom Mooney Interview Part 2

A: deferred comp provision, which was the best in the state -- severance pay, in other words -- from then until we just recently, the local, gave some of it back because it became really hard to justify.

Basically what it is sick leave conversion. You get 15 sick days a year. In most districts, especially then, nearly all districts, you had a cap on how many you could accumulate. And you would convert them. State law, the minimum is, unless you bargain otherwise, 25 percent of the total with whatever cap you get paid at retirement. We bargained unlimited accumulation and 50 percent conversion, it was unheard of at the time. And boy does it get expensive down the road.

We met or exceeded the cost of living every single year. At some point, nobody's around and you justified that big deferred comp thing, so we hadn't had the association bargaining, high-inflation 70's, there were years with no raises and three percent was a

big raise. I think three-and-a-half, might have been one four in the whole seventies. Maybe a three-and-a-half and the rest three or below. So you could justify this can't pay you now, pay you later. But after 20 years of getting steady raises, it's harder to justify, writing those big checks. Then the press starts talking about them. The superintendent is "Whoa, did the teachers get that too?" So they did give some ground in the last contract.

Q: But this is not bad for a first contract after a four-week strike.

A: Yes and no. I mean, we certainly played it up, the good parts of it. I think in reality you sort of fought them until a bloody draw. It was really a good settlement given the actual strength that we had, and the number of people we actually had out. That's for sure. Then in light of the president packing in the end and undercutting Bates, Bates has nerves of steel. If the president hadn't kind of interfered and gone around him, I think we might have done a little better. Then there was the militant wing, and this was part of the untold story for the most part. I can give you plenty of collaborators. We were conspiring and we let Bates in on the conspiracy, kind of we're here if you need us, here's what we've got planned. We were planning a sit-down occupation of the education center. Remember, this is the 60's generation. We had… I don't remember now. Geez, it was hundreds. At least a couple hundred people signed up to do this, because we could tell we were at the break point, that we were going to have to fight a settlement because we weren't going to be able to keep people out. By the way, along the way they got injunctions, court ordered us all back to work. Everybody proudly framed their injunctions or tore them up or burned them. That did not cause a ripple. Some of us got worn down economically or they didn't think we were winning and hardly anybody was out at their school, but it wasn't because of the legal threats. The day after that, we didn't see any big attrition.

Q: Basically, "you can't fire us all" type mentality.

A: Right.

Q: Were any fines levied on them?

A: They never did end up fining us as individuals. I'm trying to remember if they fined officers of the union. I can't remember. They might've. Of course, it may have helped that we had some political support even when it was over, like of course we had a no retaliation clause, which they didn't honor. That's another story, but anyway, the point is that we knew, everybody knew that this gotta get settled pretty soon here. But our thought was that we've got to ratchet up the pressure one more time, real quick, before we maximize our leverage and get the best settlement. I don't know in retrospect whether this was a good idea. It seemed like a real good idea at the time and we could've done it. And we're already illegal, so who cares? So we're going to occupy the lobby of the Ed Center, sit down, just sit to say, and what are they going to do? Let 'em put us all in jail. Let 'em drag us off and fill up the jails. Fine. Then that becomes a problem. The problem is we've got all these schoolteachers in jail. What are we going to do with them? The point was to force more of a crisis. Actually, given that our tactics were pretty much traditional militant tactics at the time, I don't think we could've lost anything and probably would've gained by taking it just one step further, totally non-violet sit-in approach.

Bates seemed to be game, but the president panicked at the thought of this. Then people dragged, some of the political and business leaders dragged him off into back rooms and

threatened and cajoled and intimidated. Whatever, we settled. And then I got up, actually, representing at the ratification meaning.

Oh, I know what -- I'm sorry. The other part that's important, though, is the settlement. I can actually be sort of philosophical about it now, but at the time we were really pissed off, because not only do we feel they caved a little too soon, but the settlement was made or agreed to by the bargain team in a median hotel room and a couple of us didn't get told where it was. At least, that was our perception. That wasn't just me. There was two older guys, including the past president who went to jail, and another, one of my mentors, a charter member of the local. We were sort of the militant faction on the bargaining teams, three out of the nine. You know a couple that were real flaky, and most of them were just solid in the middle. Some of them got real shaky and panicky like the president did, or they took his example. But anyway, the three of us were ready to hold out, and we somehow didn't get notified exactly where. I'm wandering around the damn hotel lobby, trying to find the damn meeting! That left a bad taste, obviously. So I did get up, even though I was on the team, got up and spoke against ratification and we had our 200 militants come, voted against it. But we moved on. It probably actually created then the foundation for us forming a caucus and contesting the leadership a couple years later. But in the meantime, we weren't overtly oppositional, at least for a while. Sharon Cole had already moved on by then. Lynn Marmer became the second vice-president director of organization, but after a year, maybe less than a year, she decided to go back to school. Either that, or is that when she got married and moved to Baltimore. Anyway, she left for a while there, came back. So having been, I think, a pretty good area coordinator and

showing membership growth and organizational skills in those schools, got tapped for that job.

Well, this is now the key, at least from the way the local functioned up to then, this was the key job other than the president, certainly, was the one, you had your fingers on the organizational apparatus. It's definitely the place to be if you want to run for president. So that was in '78. So this was a pretty rapid series of developments. Then with the election of '79 is when kind of the -- so the mostly middle school-based younger, more militant folks began to talk and began to talk about actually running a slate and forming a caucus.

In Cincinnati we didn't end up, I think for us at least, it was the right thing; that we didn't end up with sort of permanent caucuses. Caucuses would form really around a slate. More of a campaign committee and then kind of dissipate. The years I was president, I always debated with myself and my closest associates and advisors who should have a more permanent caucus to advance a program and really kind of have more of a cohesive philosophy of where we're trying to lead the union. But it just wasn't part of the culture. I never really kind of made up my mind, I suppose. We made a couple of attempts, but I think it just was more of a free wheeling, democratic local. It was idea democracy, was pretty rooted in, like monthly membership meetings are still scared. Once along the way, I tried to get them to consider rep assembly. It bombed, totally. And a fairly strong leader by that point. They weren't buying that. It was just alien to the traditions and the culture.

Q: That's interesting, that Conservative Cincinnati -- and the membership is more open to an open democracy, the town hall meeting type thing.

A: Because it was the kind of activist culture that built the union. It wasn't necessarily typical of Cincinnati, characteristic of Cincinnati. So we never had permanent caucuses. But we did form a slate and a committee which we called CFT New Directions. And it was like a lot of maneuvering and who's going to run for what, so I didn't announce I was running for president until fairly late in the game. The president was certainly on notice that there was dissent and some dissatisfaction and had served ten years through three bargaining elections and first contract and strike. So he had every reason to maybe also be a little worn out. I don't know, not trying to speak for him. But he decided not to run. But his followers did their best to put together a slate. I won the presidency and it was a mixed slate that got elected. But we managed to work together fairly well in that first term. But things got more polarized toward the end. He decided to make a comeback, sensing that there was enough division and among the membership and he might be right. He put together another slate, and I was somewhat at a disadvantage because he had really well-known names. He had folks who had been active during the long years of exile and just were very well known, as leaders of the union. I had pretty much a slate of young turks, including some of the people who were elected from the other slate in 79 had faded away, had not stuck around, so I filled those vacancies, with more of the young turks. So we had a lopsided situation in terms of the stature of candidates, I suppose. I don't know what my stature was, then other than the president.

Q: Now, your first year as president, let's go back to that.

What were some of your goals in trying to build a better union?

A: Well, the most urgent problem was, by this time we're in the third year of our first contract. We've got a six percent raise after a month on strike, and no raise in '78 or '79. So we've gone two years with no raise. So was everybody else in the district, the district's financial crisis had significantly worsened by then, because they still haven't been able to pass a levy. They had a string of defeated levies.

Q: It's because of this law you were talking about before. Have to go back to that.

A: Because the levies we needed to pass especially because of that law we couldn't pass because of too much strife in the city. And people weren't used to, well, people were used to passing levies, but not as often as they were now going to be needed. So they really were by '79, they were pretty broke. There had been a lot of cuts. Of course, the other thing is, they kept saying to people, they made huge tactical blunders. They kept saying to the public every time there was a levy, "This is do or die. If we don't pass this, we don't know what we're going to do. We might not be able to keep the doors open." Well, then they would make cuts, so the quality of the program is diminishing steadily and the public doesn't believe them anymore. "Yeah, right. They've got a whole bunch of money and they'll find a way. Just keep saying no, because they always manage to keep going." So credibility is a big issue. Somehow we had to save the district from itself as well as get our members a raise. The union, during its first contract, is still at risk of getting voted back out because by now our credit, we took them out on strike for a month. Our credibility is suffering because we couldn't deliver on either of the two reopeners. There was certainly the possibility the association could make a comeback at the next open period. So it called for fairly bold tactics and strategies, and I had to run on

some of those, including a lot more emphasis on labor solidarity, because it really wasn't a very cohesive or unified approach. On the economics, at least, everybody was in the same boat. Nobody had a raise. Everybody had seen significant cuts. So I had to move pretty quickly, getting elected in May. The contract, the overall contract expiring in December. Now, the other thing that's going on at the time is talk of merger. The main reason that talk of merger, at the local level, was alive is because our president kept fostering it. Some of us thought this was a real mistake. It was one of the things we didn't like about his leadership because it was a false hope. From what I could scope out at the national level, there were some real huge impediments. Anyway, I thought they were fucking with us. I thought they weren't really serious and I thought they were plotting to make a comeback. But also that even if they were serious, that the impediments at the national level on the NEA side were pretty formidable and that they couldn't deliver, even if they were sincere. But it's not like that was a crazy thing to think about. It just was a bad calculation that it was doable, because you probably had a third of the teachers in neither organization at this point.

When I took office, we were claiming 1,700 members, something like that. 1,800 members. I think we were claiming around 56. I remember that number for some reason. Or somewhere in the upper fifties percentile of membership. And the books were shambles. When we to the best of our ability cleaned it up, we had under 1,500 members. This was at the time, there was like 4,000 teachers then. We definitely did not have 50 percent membership, even. We had to build membership. We had to try to rally people behind the CFT. We had to deliver on the next contracts, especially on money, in

a very tough environment. We had to put this merger thing to bed. That was real clear to me, and I think I was probably getting pretty good. I was getting not dictates, but pretty good advice probably from AFT, bouncing off people up there that this wasn't getting us anywhere. We need to get them to rally behind the CFT as the bargaining agent and not hold out this illusion that all the problems are going to be solved if we merge. So I just felt like something dramatic had to be done to bring that to a close. There had been on and off some conversations. I invited them to have merger discussions, and had my team prepped. We walked in with a full four-way, NYSUT-style merger. Everybody's a member of everything, there's one local. It was affiliated with everybody. Had it written out and outlined in the form of a constitution to be worked out later, signed it, handed it across the table. And (grumbling noises) "we have to consult..." So I said fine, we understand, you can consult, members and your national folks, so we'll meet in a week. So we put out a big flyer. 'CFT offers full merger'. Because the whole point is winning the hearts and minds out there, either we're going to do this or we're going to stop holding onto this illusion that's holding us up from real organizing. I don't know, they probably knew what we were doing, but they didn't know what else to do. So we'd meet again a week later. They can't do that. Not consistent with NEA bylaws or blah blah blah. So this time we had an LA-type merger. Now this is after I spent a lot of time on the phone, because this is a calculated risk now. Because I spent a lot of time on the phone with Kugler at the time. Was it Kugler, or was it Chuck? No, it wasn't, it was Chuck Richards at the time. Trying to figure out exactly what their parameters were and take our best guess at least at what the NEA would or wouldn't allow. I came to the conclusion, although it was not totally, totally guaranteed that they wouldn't let them do an LA thing

either. You know what I'm talking about, the LA thing, where you have a new organization, you still have technically an AFT, and then you have your local underneath that. But for the purpose of affiliation with their respective bodies, but there's one local. So this was really the calculated risk, that they wouldn't be able to do that either. So when they rejected the full merger, we had another agreement written up saying we'd do it basically L.A. style, sign that, hand it across the table. What that proved is that they were just fucking with us all along! They were just taking advantage of our former president, who was looking for some quick strike to avoid having to really organize. Some quick stroke, in other words, to pull all of this together and gain lots more leverage. And the bluff had to be called. So they couldn't sign that either, turns out. So our next wire was off the next day, blazing headline. 'NEA kills merger in Cincinnati'. I discovered not to blame the local people. I believe they were sincere. But their national organization will not allow it. We've now found that out. They wouldn't allow version A, they wouldn't allow version B. It's over. And actually it really did put it to bed. It really did, and in fact, not only that, the rest of the story, but after we got a contract and all that, but the next open period for a representation challenge, they didn't even mount a challenge. Or if they did, they didn't even get the thirty percent signatures either to trigger an election.

Q: So the CFT's finally solidified within….

A: Well, this was just one of the preconditions, was getting this merger thing out of the way. Now we had to get a contract that would restore credibility. So what we did is -- and we even had to pass a levy to get any kind of financial settlement was any good. But we also knew we couldn't wait, and we were saying we're not going to wait for a raise until a levy

passes. The next obstacle after getting the merger thing out of the way was saving the board from itself by ending the crying wolf approach, where they had painted themselves into a corner by keep saying we're going to have to close, or we're going to have to do something nasty if you don't pass this levy, and then they don't. So we made a demand on them that when the money runs out, you close the schools. Stop crying wolf. You sold the public on this before. It's time to do it. Now, we didn't put it in public terms, we put it in no more cuts. We can't cut the quality of the program any more. It would be better to simply close the doors for the rest of the year when the money runs out. The money was projected to run out in mid-November. So you'd be talking about, I don't know what, six weeks or something. Because we were then on a calendar year, fiscal year. Now it's on a school academic year. You couldn't run a deficit. Still can't. But at that time, you could close schools. You literally had the board of actually closing schools because they ran out of money. It had already been done in Cleveland and Toledo and some other places. Ohio was on the map in the worst way nationally for its schools literally -- the school funding system was so screwed up that whole districts were closing. We were out openly advocating no more cuts, draw the line in the sand, stop crying wolf. It would be better to close the schools than make more cuts. And by the way, it might convince the public you really do need the levy!

So that was our demand. The contract's going to run out in December. This is October, and we're agitating around what we're going to do to set the stage to get a decent contract and set the stage to pass a levy. So we call a mass meeting early in the morning. I had to do the association thing one more time, because we had a mass meeting to decide what to

do. This was actually a tactic that the union had already done a number of times, and so had the CTA. Six a.m. meetings where we might not go to school, you don't know. We might just decide to strike. That was kind of an old ploy, we weren't really threatening that that day, but we were keeping some mystery and we were going to call on you and decide what we're going to do about this crisis and what we're going to do about the contract coming up. It's only October. The contract hasn't expired. Doesn't expire until end of December. So we put a proposition on the floor that we close, that we go on strike for a day. October 26. We have a march, we do a big march to dramatize the need to close the schools, pass a levy, and give teachers need catch up raises. We call on the board for them to close the schools that day, and you just dump the tenure to keep schools open without us because no union had ever closed the schools through job action up to that point, neither the federation nor association had gotten them to just say we can't stay open. They always, of course, had skeleton staff, but they wouldn't close. We demanded that they close the schools that day and then close the schools in November when the money ran out, and it was also designed to send a message that you'd better be damn serious when you come to the bargaining table. But we could do this, because there's no bargaining law. We can't strike legally, but what are they going to do about it, and there's no framework for the bargaining process. So we did in fact do that. They acceded to our demands before the day came. They really saw finally a train coming. And I'm skipping all the organizing we did to get people behind us, but I would say a lot. They felt that roar coming out of schools, the principals reporting "they're all going to the march." We actually got a permit to march in the streets at rush hour. You would never get that permit today, nor would we want to do that today. It would piss off the public -- different

time, different set of issues, different mentality on the union's part, but at that point you just needed to have the whole -- everybody get loud and clear, we ain't putting up with this shit no more, and this has to come to a crisis.

About a week before the day, and of course, we gave ourselves two weeks between when we voted and when we're going to go do it. We set October 26th as the date. So they saw it coming. They voted to close the schools on October 26th and join the march, because it really is about a lack of state funding, which was part of the problem. We gave the state some of our flak, too. They were trying to in other words deflect it from them to the state and they were going to march with us. They did, in fact, vote to close the schools when the money ran out. In other words, they basically agreed to our strategy. They were hanging by a hair. The board was split whether to finally close the schools or whether to make more cuts -- and some saying it's irresponsible to close, to keep kids out of school. So we pushed them over the edge on that and the march was pretty incredible.

It was the largest labor march. From what I could tell from the newspaper archives and from talking to the old hands in the labor movement, it was the largest labor march in Cincinnati, at least since the early '50s. We had the Labor Council with us in the front of the march and other union leaders and some community leaders -- mostly labor. And we blocked traffic for, you know, miles and miles and miles in every direction because it was rush hour to commute into downtown. We went right through downtown. (laughter)

Q: No, you could not do that today.

A: No. And these people were pissed. They were honking at us. I mean, some people honked but most not, you know -- gesturing and cursing and stuff. But we got their attention, you know; something had to give.

So then we come back and a few weeks later school is closed. We'd get our people all ready to sign up for unemployment. The Board pulls a fast one. Somehow or other, I don't remember the details of this. It was some maneuver that they pulled whereby we wouldn't get the full unemployment we were entitled to. We've sued on that but, in the end, we got…. I think, we were closed three weeks. It was one week that was in question. We got some unemployment. You'll have to check me on that.

Q: OK.

A: But we got some unemployment but there was a dispute about how much. Then they figured out also that they could re-open the schools in mid-December because they wouldn't have to pay people until January because the way pay periods were in. So we were only closed three weeks, which was fine, and that was enough that in the following June they passed the levy. But that's what it was. It was mostly the school closing. It was not about the march or the militancy.

In the meantime, we got to go to the table. Then, we started negotiations in December and the levy hasn't passed yet. So the other maneuver we had been working on was for city council, and we got some friends on city council, including Jerry Springer who was the up-and-coming, at that point, mayor. We also had a Republican friend, kind of a whacky guy named DeCourcey and the two of them got together. And the City Council

has no jurisdiction of the schools; completely separate governmental amenities in Ohio, other than in Cleveland which was put in because, mayoral controls put in just recently in recent years which was a disaster. But, constitutionally, there's no connection. So they have no financial obligation and no even right to give money to schools if they want to but we didn't let that stand in the way.

So we start working up some support over there to be our ace in the hole in the end. But meanwhile, we go to the table and say, "We need real raises. We need catch-up raises." The amount of people that left their schools and marched, the message was pretty strong. They would be serious, and we were prepared to strike and made no bones about it. And that was almost a miracle because after the '77 strike, so divisive, so long, gains modest. You know, the strike reluctance was pretty damned high but we had gotten pretty whipped up. So, long story short: They knew we were serious and that we had to be real creative and they had to be real creative about getting around the law because the law also -- The other impediment is the law says, "You can't grant raises -- bargained or otherwise -- without certifying -- The Treasurer and Superintendent are going to have to sign certificates under various penalties if they are lying that they have the money to pay them. They have to be able to pay the raises and operate schools kind of roughly comparable to the program that they're running now for the remainder of the current fiscal year and the following year.

Now they've made that even worse today but, at the time, that was it; remainder of the current year and the following year. Well, that meant, in theory, we had our lawyers

working on this and they were motivated enough now they decide to start to try to be creative.

When it gets to December, you've got a few days left in the current fiscal year; you've got to get through one more year. So, if nothing else, if they were convinced that they had to give raises, the teacher attrition rates were massive by the way during this period, all during the year, people are leaving. It's not at the end, just at the end. I knew they'd have problems from that respect, as well as the militancy.

So the theory -- You could say, "OK, it's the end. '79 is almost over. We got to get through '80. We can't certify we can afford raises in '80 but effective January 1, '81, we can grant whatever raises we want. That doesn't mean we have the money to pay them. Nor do we have to certify that we have the money to pay them, and if we don't have the money to pay them and keep the doors open, then what happens in '81 is we have to go to the State Loan Fund. At that time that an option of closing schools or going to the State Loan Fund. If you went to the State Loan Fund, they would have to loan you enough money to cover your contractual obligations, as well as maintain operations.

But there's a price to be paid for that. The State Loan Fund was really kind of like being a Third World country in the clutches of the IMF. You have to pay the loan back over a pretty short period of time, and you have to make cuts along the way to do that. So, first, you got to take away meat from the peasants and then milk and then bread as you pay

back your IMF loan. It was ugly but it was, in the short term, a way of getting raises to stabilize the work force and stabilize the district, while you tried to pass another levy.

So you could sign such a thing and it would be legal and it would be binding, and the State would have to cover your vet at least in the short term, if you didn't pass a levy in between. So we began to talk about, in other words, this kind of an arrangement. And the question became: What are the numbers?

The bigger, a thornier issue even was: What do you do in the short term? What do you do for 1980? "We're not going a third year without a raise. We're not doing it. We would go on strike."

Well, that's where the council thing came in. Somehow or other, I can't even remember what the legal, why we decided this was legal. But where they claimed they didn't have any money, they couldn't legally pay anything in the first year unless it was contingent on passing a levy. We got the Council to pass a resolution guaranteeing the School Board to up to $5 million, if needed, to fund the contract in the first year.

Again, there was no structural connection between the City and the schools, just because we had enough political friends on the Council.

We had been playing the Council races for many years. That's when that long-term, even at a low level, of political action pays off.

So that kind of put them in a corner. When it got down to the only issue is what to do about the first year, and then we sprung our City Council surprise and that kind of made them have to come and agree to something in the first year.

The bottom line: We got 5.3% guaranteed in the first year, paid up front. We got another 10% contingent on the passage of a levy; this would be on the ballot in June. We got, in '81, a guaranteed, levy or no-levy, 12.5% and… what the hell was the third? I think it was 8. We also got bonuses for making up for the previous two years. We got a one-time payment, two one-time payments.

Along the way, as we were getting close to these numbers, we would caucus, and I had John Criatura, who's one of our veteran of OFT staff reps, with us. We did have somebody from AFT. Who was it? But, anyway we would caucus and we'd go, "Shit, look at all this money." (laughter) I can't believe it.

Then we would come back, they'd come back and we'd go: "This sucks! We can't possibly recommend." We were pretty good at the traditional bargaining game. The first year's got to get better especially or we're taking a walk.

Now it's getting to December 31st. So if we don't ink something, at 12:01 A.M., the Board has got to certify they can afford whatever it is for all of '80 and all of '81, two full years. So you're putting off any big money, at least, another a year. The pressure was on

everybody. It's really a game of nerves at that point. But, in the end, we did get an agreement.

Oh, I'm sorry. I skipped a major step there. We're at the table with all of the unions. Along the way, back in the Fall prior to the march -- actually, a part of the October 26th one-day strike in March, which, by the way, the School Board closed, so we did get to make up that day and make up the pay -- we formed a united bargaining council with all of the unions. That was a key. It was something I had campaigned on earlier in '79 and was able to put together. So we're all there together at the table.

Q: AFSCME, Teamsters, Building….

A: The only time that worked. But it worked because we were all really in the same boat, and essentially, what we were doing is putting off the non-economics. This was going to be an economic agreement for three years with a real re-opener on the non-economic issues. I think it was after the levy vote; or maybe it was right away.

We had to get the money done. We knew that by December 31st. Everybody understood that. So since it was only money, there was all common issues, it was easier, at least, to stay on track. So, I was the chief spokesperson, the chief negotiator, when the leaders of the other unions were like twice my age. That was kind of interesting and delicate. But, all in all, it worked. They were good guys and they seemed to respect what I was doing. But I'm talking about guys who had built their unions like Al Van Hagen was like legendary, the AFSCME leader for the city workers and country workers, as well as the schools. Stan Inman who was the strongest ally we ever had from the operating

engineers. That was before a lot of the heating and air-conditioning was mechanized. So these plan operators can really shut the thing down all by themselves.

There was Building Trades Council represented, maybe a hundred trades people that worked for the district at the time. At that time, the secretaries had an association but it wasn't really union, so they were the only ones that weren't at the table.

So we hung tough and we hung together. We got this massive agreement. I'm trying to remember. I used to be able to rattle these numbers off but, over three years, we had 27.5% increase on the base over the three years. The levy did pass, so we got the 10%. We actually ended up with 15.3 in the first year. The 5.3 was guaranteed; the 10 was contingent on the levy. And what was the bonuses? Twenty-seven and a half percent was raises. I think it was 12% in bonuses.

Q: I saw that was 38% in total.

A: OK.

Q: For that whole period.

A: Yeah, yeah. That sounds right. OK. So that was tumultuous and exhilarating. The first eight months in office. (laughter)

Q: What a ride! Are you still teaching at this time?

A: No. Our constitution actually says that the president's a full-time position.

Q: OK.

A: I came out of the classroom pretty much right away in May of '79.

Q: So that was your first eight months and pretty much your first year presidency.

A: Yes. And we had to work hard, of course, to pass the levy but I think the school closing really consolidated it. Then, we had this long, drawn-out non-economic bargaining and we did get some things. We got a lay-off procedure. Neither our first contract nor the three contracts the CTA bargained every had a lay-off procedure, which is pretty basic. But the Board apparently really resisted that.

Now, interestingly, what we ended up doing really was pretty much putting their existing policy into the contract initially. At the time, we thought it was way less than we wanted but, at least, it was enforceable what it says, what the criteria are and you have to follow it and agree with it.

In the end, in retrospect, years later, we figured, "No, it's not so bad. We tightened it up here and there but the basic outline of it is still what it was, and it ain't so bad.

What we're really talking about is the role of seniority and, of course, we're looking at the flagship contracts as we formulated our demands for the first contract in '77 to later ones. I remember at the time that, to me, at least, the premier contract was Philly. Philly had the most detail on everything from transfer assignment to class size and whatever. Then there was Chicago. But New York's wasn't as, New York's was a little thinner, not that that's a judgment but, at the time, Philly was like the one.

Now, some of what is there in retrospect probably that's why we didn't get 'cause you get, it's too much of an albatross around your neck to have too many fine details that

everybody can now point out and say, "That's what's holding," you know, "progress." But one of the chief examples of that is seniority as regards to -- not so much lay-offs even as transfer in assignment 'cause the language we have in the lay-offs parallels the language we got on transfer, whether voluntary or involuntary. It's about people competing to fill a vacancy or figuring out who gets involuntarily transferred or even who gets laid off. The criteria are training, experience and qualifications for the position in question being substantially equal than seniority or controls of choice. "Seniority," meaning "seniority in the system," in the district. And, of course, we even thought we ought to have peer seniority and, then, a moment in time came and we go, "Boy, we're glad we didn't get that." (laughter), seriously --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and that this thing is working out pretty well, I mean, given the times we're in now and what's called "pork." We tightened up the some hearing process and enforceability and stuff like that.

With lay-offs, it's more about training versus qualifications for what does the district need in general? And in lay-off, it was really almost always by seniority because they knew we would fight harder for seniority; it'd be the decision-maker.

But here's the other truth is that as long as the central Personnel Office was administering that language, seniority in the vast majority of the cases is what they used. One, in part, because they knew we were more likely to grieve it, or teachers were more likely to

grieve it, and 2 because it was easier and they didn't know so much what was needed at the school to be more selective.

What we later did is negotiate for site-based selection of people for vacancies by a committee of teachers. Whoever, the grade level or the department that has a vacancy forms an interview panel and they, with the principal or designee, do the interviews and make the decision.

The Personnel Office's role becomes to recruit and provide, maintain the lists and post the vacancies and, then, they process the applications. If somebody applies for that school, the vacancy of that school, then, they send in their names but the School makes the decision.

We did not change the criteria, and this is neat because the criteria didn't have to be changed. But we've changed the locus of decision-making. Far less often is seniority the deciding factor because they know what they want, they know what they need. They're more likely to use the discretion of contract, in fact, gave them to look at qualifications, training and experience first. But they're still obligated to use seniority, if they can't show a substantial difference.

Now the next problem is, how do you protect against arbitrary, capricious, discriminatory -- whatever -- by the teachers and the principal? You have to have some kind of appeal mechanism, but it can't be a traditional grievance because a grievance is probably against

the administration/ management. In this case, management was only one party at the table. We created an appeal process as an internal appeal process. We also figured a labor arbitrator is less likely to be the person -- I mean, it's not about a matter of law. It's about a matter of professional qualifications applied to a certain position and that professionals ought to review that. So we created an internal district-wide appeal panel of teachers and administrators, equal numbers, -- we appoint the teachers -- and they would review the appeals and review the facts and they could overturn the school's decision.

But the roots of this will go all the way back to when we tried and failed to get strict seniority and ended up with criteria that worked out pretty well. (laughter) I don't know that every teacher in Cincinnati would agree. Somebody who didn't get a job might not. But, I think most people would agree it's defensible, and now that it's decentralized, it's more professional.

So in the non-economic re-opener of '81, we got the first lay-off procedure. We also managed to get a dental plan during non-economic negotiations. We had no dental coverage at this time, and the way we did that was we pushed the Board to go for competitive bidding of the health insurance to see if we could save money and apply it to dental coverage. They didn't want to bother themselves doing that. We had an independent insurance consultant, actually look at their current coverage and look at the paying for it and give us some notion of whether we could save money enough by competitive bidding by a dental plan. He came back and said, "Well, your first problem

is going to be if you change carriers, there's that reserve fund that Blue Cross is going to get to keep." We go, (laughter) "What reserve fund. Tell us more."

Oh, they had, I don't know what, three million bucks. Now it feels like seven-million bucks. What's the term the insurance companies use rather "profit"? Not "residuals." Some, term that they still use where this is a fully-insured plan, so they set a premium, probably inflated, but they set a premium based on what they project their costs will be, claims will be, and if they don't spend it, it goes into a reserve account that's, in fact, kept as a reserve account for your group but the money belongs to Blue Cross. You're not going to get it back. If it doesn't get used, they keep it -- I don't know after some period of time. So we knew we had to crack that reserve fund, which they don't have to legally give back.

So what we did is we went out and rounded up bids on a dental plan (laughter). We said, "This is what the dental plan will cost. That can easily pay for the rest of this three-year agreement out of the reserve fund that Blue Cross has."

Blue Cross said, "We ain't given it up. Nah, that reserve fund belongs to us." So we went public with it. They've been overcharging the district. The district hasn't used competitive bidding, and they're getting overcharged, and that money should be freed up, so that teachers can have a dental coverage. And we got it.

I learned a lot from that. In terms of future bargaining, we got a little bit more sophisticated that when we come to bargaining benefits, we get on the same side of the table with the district and try to squeeze the health insurance and the providers.

So I can't remember what else we got. We got some other language stuff. But those are the two biggies on that.

But, in the meantime, what's happening is we're allowing ourselves to get embroiled within the local and social issues and political issues because there was a lot of underlying tension still in the district and in the community about under-representation of minority teachers. Minority teachers' feeling the brunt of these racial-balance transfers, push for affirmative action and hiring. The Deseg-suit is still not settled, so that's a big, underlying tension.

I would say me and some of my closest supporters got wanting to do the right thing and be on the right side of these issues and knowing that we needed community support to have the strength to deal with the power structure and the community as represented by the School Board, we're a little overzealous in pursuing these issues or didn't pursue them in a way that was altogether unifying. There was some very specific thing that came down, too, that had to be voted on, that we supported some kind of affirmative action plan that then our adversaries from the prior elections or adversaries within the union or people who were still licking their wounds from a previous election were able to jump on

and tried to convince people that we were actually talking about displacing white teachers in order to hire black teachers which we weren't that stupid.

But we were guilty of getting an overdose of political correctness in trying to show what great white liberals we were. We were trying to do the right thing, with the best intentions, and some of it was tactical, knowing that we -- not "tactical" but "strategic" -- we needed community support in order to counter the power that we confronted across the table which was the ruling class of the City. But, anyway, we didn't handle it altogether well, so things got polarized.

The prior president smelled there was opportunity. So he put together a slate called "The Roger Stevens' Victory Party," with names, as I mentioned, much more well-known names even then just plain names than folks that were the young hard worker types that were on my slate. And they won. I beat him and they won all the other offices.

I think the Executive Board was pretty evenly balanced because most of the area coordinators that were on the Board at that time are still on the Board, where my younger folks had been the area coordinators during the strike, or people much like them.

So I could deal with the Board but the officers were a problem. It didn't stay a problem for long because when their guy didn't win, this kind of tells you a lot about what faction of the union they were representing, they (a) didn't really want to do the work. Some of them had been recruited to office and told they wouldn't have to do the work, that

somebody else was actually going to do the work, like the Treasurer. They ran a black female who was very attractive and well known long activist, not a lightweight. But she didn't know how to be treasurer. They told her the "white male dude is the grievance guy," under the old regime. He was still grievance Chair when I was there, when I became elected, and was very confidante, that he was actually going to do the books -- no worry.

She said, "OK." And other people, god knows what their expectations were, but the point is, the First Vice President and the Recording Secretary didn't last six months. Both later became principals, not too far down the road. But they basically resigned and said, "I don't want to do it." So I was able to get my folks in.

The Treasurer just decided, "I wasn't going to let them play her this way. So meanwhile, this other guy, the guy that was going to do the books for him isn't around anymore. So, I just decided we were going to work with her if she was going to be the Treasurer. She was really going to be the Treasurer and we wanted to have good black officers and leaders anyway. I wasn't going to let them play her that way. I was going to get her on my team, and we did. We became long, long allies and friends, and she did fine. So, basically, by the end of the first year, if not before, we were politically fine and back in strong position. But it was a little nasty fight there for a while.

Q: This is when you start -- once everything is solidified, your union's has more of a solidarity feeling with everybody -- Is this when you start realizing that contract negotiations need to go into more professional development mode?

A: Yeah, a combination of things led to that. But, first of all, I told you that in '81 when the Association could have challenged, they weren't able to get even 30%. But in '84, they did. AFT came in, it was very helpful. I think they actually had done the first real professional polling of a local membership in relation to organizing and bargaining representation. I believe that's what it was and it was not cheap. In 1984 dollars, it was expensive because what we were trying to find out is why were they getting any traction at all, after all these economic gains and what do we have to do to shut them down once and for all.

Of course, you have to have the theory, you have to have things to test. You have to know have some hypotheses if you're going to have a good poll in my experience.

So it goes back to…remember I talked about that first set of bargaining proposals we developed in late '76 that was like this whole manual for transforming the school system? Well, we weren't able to get much (laughter) of that except for the economic and sort of basic working-condition rights and stuff. But teacher voice? Or even really improve working conditions in terms of class size or numbers of teaching periods or numbers of different course assignments, we haven't made much progress on that because that stuff's expensive?

Plus, they didn't want to put those things in the contract if they didn't have to. I mean, they were set. Their attitude was very clear from Day 1, "If we have to bargain, we're going to keep it, wages and hours and, the most narrowly-defined working conditions."

So that no matter what idealism you start with, if you take only a traditional approach to a problem, you're going to get funneled in that direction and not meet people's expectations on the other -- not even necessarily exotic reform issues but just having a voice in the day-to-day running of the school, curriculum and working conditions, literally work loads we haven't really made a dent on.

So that was my hypothesis and the poll kind of bore that out and that we had to deliver on those kinds of things. Now the dilemma is also, despite the one-day strike that was successful and was a real pressure-cooker circumstance; the strike reluctance on the part of the teachers was very high and no secret. I knew it. It was loud and clear to me. It was loud and clear to the principals who filtered it up to the top bosses.

On the one hand, they're telling us they want a whole bunch of things that I know from having been at the table and been out there that they weren't likely to get without a strike, weren't going to get without a strike, combined with they don't want to strike because I also have had the experience by now of calling, well, during their economic re-openers that the previous president had when I was a Director of Organization, we couldn't get anything, calling strike authorization votes during the non-economic re-opener and that dragged on.

They will vote with their feet. They ain't coming to the meeting. They ain't going to give you any encouragement to think they might consider a strike because they just don't even come to the meeting. Then, you know what there physically in the room you got. You

ain't got shit based on the numbers that even showed up. They didn't show up to vote a no, because they know if they showed up, we'd be put in the paper: "Two thousand teachers came to," (laughter) "consider a strike authorization." So, it ain't done.

So, the point is it was somewhat, "Necessity is the mother of invention." To win that bargaining election we simply articulated what the poll said that we know this is what teachers want and this is what we're pledged to. We've made human economic gains.

Now, the next phase is we're going to go after these things. We've proven we can get the job done. We're effective. So much more effective than the Association at bargaining and here's the agenda for the next round.

Remember, there was a little bit of a false scare because they got the signatures the same way we got them, three times, by telling people, "This doesn't necessarily mean you support us being the bargaining agent. It's just the fair and democratic thing to do, to have an election." We've had one, two, three, four. So how hard is it to get people to say, "Well, it's time for an election again. We do this every three years, but, we need so many signatures to get an election and that's the only fair thing to do." That's how they got it's not hard to get the signatures.

But we took it seriously nonetheless, but we beat the crap out of them. It was like 70%. It was like 69.5%.

Q: Wow!

A: So that really was the end of that. I mean, they never came back after that and they faded away fairly fast. We didn't get fair share. But we had to build our membership up before we could get fair share. By this time, by the way, we had in '84, we had a bargaining law, with the possibility of negotiating a fair share and a really broad-scoped of bargaining, that's its best feature, and the right to strike. We're now in a stronger position. Following that bargaining election in '83, we're in a stronger position and it would be the first contract negotiated under that new law.

You know what I don't remember thinking at the time is? Oh, everything is changing at this law because, really, we still felt like what we were going to get is based on our strength, politically as well as internally and we can get whatever we can get.

We were used to the climate where, "What you can get is how much pressure you can put on the employer." I think, in retrospect, I understand more how the legal framework, helped but it was so new that nobody had any real clear expectations of what it would mean.

Anyway, so the next thing. This is where we now start to formulate a new strategy for achieving these professional goals, including just plain old improvement in working conditions, and take a new direction in terms of both the issues that we're putting on the table and prioritizing -- and also the tactics that it needs to be successful in getting these things negotiated.

Now this is the same time that 'Nation at Risk' comes out in '83 and so education reform breaks out, but in the most negative, anti-teacher way initially, right? The first phase of this modern education reform debate or movement was very negative toward teachers actually.

I'll never forget. What the symbol of that, to me, of that period was a *Newsweek* magazine cover with "Why Johnny Can't Read," and it shows a teacher sitting in the corner with a dunce cap on. It was all teacher bashing. It was the Reagan era, very similar to now. I guess that era almost seems benign by comparison to now. As far as what, the drumbeat they were trying to get going against teachers and unions – PATCO and all that.

So, then, comes along some help a couple of years later. You get the Carnegie Report which, at least, creates another strand of the education reform debate -- teacher professionalism and raising the quality of the standards for getting into teaching -- and that's the answer. We certainly picked upon that big time. I mean, AFT picked up on that big time. So we were getting a lot of encouragement from Shanker and others to pursue issues in a new way.

Even taking old issues like class size and putting it in a new context of, "It's about kids. It's not a working-condition issue." So we tried to get those things out of our vocabulary. We never called "class size," a "working condition," but a "teaching and learning

condition" or an "educational quality improvement." We just tried to change our language on some of the old demands but also bring in some new issues.

So you're looking for opportunities, too. You're looking for how to take these big themes and translate them into specific issues that you can both rally your members around but that also resonate with the public, that also the public can support.

Q: Can I go back to Nation at Risk?

A: Mm-hmm.

Q: Your reaction and your local's view was that it's teacher bashing…--

A: Not so much the Report, itself. It's all the rhetoric around education reform and what it would mean to have education reform, and it meant cracking down on these teachers.

But I was fully on board with Shanker's approach to it which is, embrace the need for reform and then start trying to change the term of the

End of Audiofile #2

Tom Mooney Interview Part 3

A: debate about what reforms are needed. Technically what he was doing made total sense to me. Because why? Not just because of some tactical plan, but because it was true. As long as he'd been out of the classroom, he still had his ear to the ground. His instincts had not deserted him. I'm not hearing in the faculty lounge how great, what you saw in NEA press releases. Everything's great, the public schools just need more money. You're hearing mostly complaints about how the thing's run, about the bureaucracy, about the low standards. So why would I go out in public and voice something different? You

don't have to agree to everything that's in the report, but this was the first call to action where the details were less important than the call to action that we needed to upgrade and improve our schools. It gave us a chance to enter into that debate. Yeah I thought just following Shanker in this because it made a lot of sense and it fit my local circumstances.

One reason we would more readily embrace it than maybe some of the more mature established locals is that we hadn't yet gotten a lot of the things in the contract that we needed that they already had. And we're in a very conservative border town that's pretty anti -- not very union friendly. So we got to come up with some creative way to get even the traditional stuff, much less the next wave of teacher empowerment and professionalism. So it really just all made sense. Also necessity is the mother of invention. I had to figure out some way to get leverage to get these people the stuff they wanted without them having to go on strike to get it. Now actually though I was still pretty sure, given our power structure, that we would have to go on strike to get the stuff. So the real problem is how to reframe militancy, how to get them to feel instead of it is unprofessional to strike that under these conditions in this context for these proposals it's the only professional thing to do. That was where we knew I had to get, and that was a big long arc to get there. So it has to be what the demands are about, they have to be clearly good for kids, they have to feel so that the community will support them, they have to feel that community support when they're going to their cocktail parties. Of course you have a lot of teachers who are traveling not just in labor circles, not just in fellow teacher circles, but in their spouses' business circles or in their own social circles

that go beyond teaching and into higher economic levels of the community. You want them to start hearing good buzz about what the CFT is pushing for and proposing rather than them being embarrassed to let on that they belong to the CFT or if it comes up they're only going to hear negative about what the union and they're threatening to strike or they're demanding that or this. So these are the big picture goals.

Of course the question is what are the issues. So we came up with a package. Well first we did another survey. We did use a pollster, a local one, but it was a little bit more of a propaganda vehicle than an objective -- the Peter Hart poll was never published obviously. I was looking for a poll that I could publish that I could use as a propaganda vehicle and to rally both the membership and the public through the press. Using a survey to reinforce the best tendencies within the union to show people who were maybe not thinking about these issues or less priority on these issues that's what most people want. It's a way of consolidating your membership as well as getting the message out to the public. We did a series of polls over the next ten years that were meant for publication. One of the things I realized over time doing that is; drop the question about how much money do you want. Literally that's totally unconventional, because that's the boilerplate thing of any bargaining survey. Eventually I figured out you don't want to publish the answer. You don't want to tell the press you're only getting part of the poll because then they're more cynical or skeptical about publishing it, what are you hiding. The reason you don't want to publish the answer is because it's either going to be too modest, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes it's too modest. You didn't want the board to know they were willing to settle for 3.5%. Or it was way too high, right.

We ain't settling for less than 10. What's the point? First of all you already know the answer. You have your ear to the ground. That's not hard. You know what monetarily they want, what you can conceivably attain. It's just a pointless question. It's only there for form's sake and it does you more harm. We just dropped it after a while. At that point we still had it in. I don't remember how we packaged it. Basically put the focus on other issues. So with what we found, some of this is a lot too. We knew that the hierarchy of need was shifting to some other issues. But you don't really know how much until you do do a poll. So what came out was the number one issue was class size. Well that in and of itself changed, allowed us to shift the terms of debate. Everybody assumes, especially once you get around talking about any kind of militancy, it's about money; it's always about money. We were able to come out and say initially going into this contract negotiation money is not the biggest priority. Class size reduction is. It's all over the map. There's no consistency because there's no limits. Some schools are favored more than others. Kindergarten classes are real high and we can't teach. So we were able to keep reminding when they wanted to go back and say well the teachers, they want this much money, we would say no, it's not about the first priority. Took a while to teach the press that, to remember that. Because they automatically want to write about money. The other two issues, we put together three issues to run a campaign around. We did this well ahead of time. Contract is running out at the end of '84. We really ran a yearlong campaign -- went right from that bargaining election victory against the association to starting this 18-month campaign.

The other two issues we came up with grading standards, academic standards, and peer review. It was meant to be a package that had broad appeal internally and externally. The grading standards was one we just stumbled into because they lowered them. In the context of a Nation at Risk, they lowered them. And they always had. Even before the union bargained at all they always had committees. They had committees for books, committees for reviewing curriculum, committees for this and that. So they had a committee on what did they call it? Grading and marking practices. Like it was just technical stuff, but it really was -- embedded in that were what the standards are. And they were already low and they lowered them. We were not at the point where we had strong representation on these kinds of committees; it was still at a point where they were handpicking. The administration handpicked and this is an example of what we had not yet achieved, the kind of voice that teachers wanted. They were still appointed. The committee would still be majority of supervisors and administrators. The teacher representatives would be picked by the superintendent. This is the point we're at. We get to nominate one person for the elementary and one person for the secondary committee that was reviewing the grading and marking practices. We made recommendations. And they ignored them and they lowered the standards further. So this is how stupid they were. Of course this is the point where they're not seeing any of this coming and they were just absolutely leading with their chin. They're just doing us every possible favor they could. What I had to do then is package the results of this and translate it into sound bites, which we did pretty successfully. It wasn't that hard. Then stick to those sound bites over and over again. So on the grading, we were able to say there's four quarters in the academic quarters. The kid who gets two Fs and two Ds passes for the year,

automatically. The teacher gives him two Fs and two Ds, the system computer's programmed to promote, pass and promote him to the next grade. A kid who gets three Fs and one C passes. Not because the teacher passed him. Because they don't let the teacher give the final grade. The teacher gives a grade for each quarter and the computer passes him. We were able to say that a teacher can recommend elementary level the kid's retained a grade, but the principal can and often does override them. Doesn't have to even tell the teacher they're doing it, they show up back in September to find out the kid got promoted over my professional judgment. We were able to say a principal can and often does change -- not often like every day but it's not uncommon -- change the kid's grade, whether it's quarter grade, final grade, exam grade. Doesn't even have to tell the teacher that they did so. They can just go into the record and change it. Guess whose grades got changed most often? Athletes'. Or just a parent who squawked. So for the sake of quieting the flak from one parent you undermine the academic quality for everybody. So you had about three, four sound bites about academic standards that were just pretty devastating. Pretty much win in the debate. But then so then what we did is since we're going to make this a demand, and this is also of course a way out of bounds from normal bargaining demands. You don't bargain academic standards. But we knew they weren't going to listen to us in any committees. We weren't even hardly represented on committees. So where else can we make them listen to us? So we put it on the table. So they say this isn't a legitimate bargaining issue, well it's here. It's an issue you need to deal with.

Then the third thing was peer review. So we showed we were deflect some of the anti-teacher talk and teachers aren't competent. Toledo had just really had been doing it for several years, but had been very quiet about it. Till they made sure it was working. So they had just started to do workshops. We were actually the second local in the country after Toledo to do this. Of course we hadn't done it for being close by, we would hear, talk to them at state conferences. They were real quiet about it right up until right around that time.

Q: Till Shanker forced them to talk about it?

A: Probably yeah. I don't even know how he found out about it because they really were very quiet about it. I think they started talking to him about it as he was encouraging education reform.

Q: I heard rumors that he heard the rumors from a nat rep or something. And Dal gets a phone call in the middle of the night saying you're coming to council.

A: I heard about it at some workshop instate. So that must have flushed them out and a light bulb went off. I inherited all the same industrial union thinking from our early days organizing as everybody else did, and I would have thought that was not our job. That's what we were taught to say at various workshops about what we would negotiate and what we were going to do and what's the union overall view. And what about that, and how would teachers react, and what do we do when my

I can just so vividly remember all these organizing meetings with good nat reps and good training and we were trained to do the training. And my early days, the president, had to do building rep workshops and tell them what to do and answer all their questions and act

like you had answers for everything, that's part of confidence-building. The union's got the answers. Then some question would come, “I got this teacher down the hall and he is totally whacked.” and “Kids come to me crazed the next period or they come to me the next year and they don’t know shit. What do we do about that?” We would say that's not our job. And you could see confusion in their eyes or skepticism. Most of them just like confusion like well gee up till now you had all the answers, like that's bullshit answer. That doesn't really help. So it's like that was in that meeting. Toledo invented this thing best as I can tell to fill a void where there really wasn't any real evaluation going on. We were trying to replace, we saw it as an opportunity to replace an aggressive but often abused evaluation process where they didn't even necessarily get the right people, and even when they did, the best thing you could say about the old system was that they sometimes correctly identified that somebody was a bad teacher. Absolutely no tools in their toolkit to do anything about that except document it, if they did that accurately, which was actually probably the exception. A good supervisor that was honest and knew what they're talking about would at least document the bad performance but that was it. What help did we have to give? When they started about November they get a couple negative observations and as the yearlong process starts out and they can see the writing on the wall and they get nervous and they come down to the union office, talk to a rep, what we could do is either find technical procedural violations or especially if they were a union activist go out for beers, clap them on the back, we won't let the bastards get you, we had no actual professional help to offer them. We often beat them in arbitration because they had screwed up the process from start to finish. We did have pretty good procedural stuff in the contract. To try to make it be fair. But the problem is the people

that were doing it were the wrong people or they didn't have enough time. They could have all the steps in there but it was all very slapdash in reality. So there was something, we just -- this isn't really helping anybody. But I didn't know what the answer was till I went to this workshop, and boom. Then he used the analogy to the craft union. Is that don't let anybody tell you, I'm paraphrasing, something to the effect of this is what craft unions and guilds have done for centuries. Don't let anybody tell you it's antiunion, teaching really is a craft, on the way to hopefully becoming a profession. Bingo, and of course I used that phrase back home a lot. But we already had enough of a strand in the union, it wasn't hard to find support for this. They wanted more professional, want to be a profession, you have to talk them out of it. You have to talk them into industrial unionism is the only kind to suppress that natural teacher desire I think to be seen as, treated as, have the status of professionals. Union leaders who think this is a hard sell, I think they're mostly haven't sold themselves. It's because it's the union leadership that's been steeped and trained in this industrial union model. So narrowly that we can't even look at other models of unionism. Either abroad or in our own history or in other trades and occupations and professions. Because industrial unions were the way of unions organized just before us. That's mostly what we were inspired by and taught by. Of course learned incredibly valuable lessons, experience, and got incredibly powerful tools from them. But we don't have to borrow everything from one source. So this was just a light bulb. So I went back and formed a committee. Basically just first thing is just formed a committee to explore it. As they looked at Toledo and they thought about and talked about whatever, they made a recommendation. Got it through our membership meeting. Sent it to the bargaining committee. Got it to the package. Wasn't that hard.

Were some people against it? Yeah, there were still some people against? Yeah. Are they a definite minority? For sure. From day one of this debate. So I really think it ought to spread more.

Q: Teachers really grasped onto this then.

A: Yes it was more controversial then than it would be five years, ten years later. It's done, but sure, basically it was not difficult to get people to embrace it. Of course the dirty little secret that some of the more traditional unions who've shied away from this don't get, maybe their circumstances are different, is it allowed us to claim a much stronger professional role. If you bite that bullet it opens up a lot of other doors. That's the first thing. I mean on the other hand, if you don't, but you're saying well teachers should be the ones that have a bigger voice, a predominant voice in curriculum decisions and selecting textbooks, deciding grading and academic standards and all kinds of other things, then when it comes to deciding what good teaching is or at least what unacceptable teaching looks like, that's somebody else's job. Well it stands to reason I think and most people are going to assume that someone else has probably got the wisdom to decide all those other things too. You just ceded the most important thing to them. But if you do bite that bullet, your credibility to demand a greater teacher voice in all these other areas is just enhanced enormously. I don't know if we anticipated that, but that's certainly how it worked out. But what it also does -- and this again, it's one of our secrets we probably don't tell enough. We were able to stop dead in their tracks all of these victimizing unfair targeting for the wrong reason evaluations that we used to spend a whole bunch of blood and treasury on arbitrating. We won more often than not, but meanwhile the person's suspended without pay for eight months or more before you get

their job back. We were able to filter all that crap out because we got control of the process. But when a serious performance problem really does surface we also deal with it seriously and professionally to try to help them and only when they can't get better, somebody's got to make that decision, and we now help make it. But all the crap that went on before is pretty much gone. In fact in the first 15 years of peer review while I was still there. Instead of having three or four arbitrations annually. Two to four at least annually on terminations. We had three in 15 years. Because one of the things about this process is designed to get union and management to a consensus by the end of the process. Hopefully figuring out early that they were misidentified. That the reason that they're referred is because they're late a lot. Not our problem, that's a disciplinary problem. The problem really is that they drink too much. Then employee assistance program. They just went through a real messy divorce or one of their children died of leukemia, there's other programs for that. But if the problem is a teaching problem we take it in. Then we designed the process to have consensus by the end either that they got better or they haven't, they're not getting any better, they need to go. It almost always does in fact accomplish that if nothing else. Getting to that consensus. The three cases went to arbitration were messy. One case a person before anybody caught it was transferred from a junior high where she was struggling to a primary open classroom team teaching situation that she was completely clueless about. So they documented that her teaching was disastrous, but we grieved because they fucked up. We should have caught it earlier too but they should never have reassigned her to that situation.

The three, there was something messy about them. Something did not go according to plan. Of the three we arbitrated we only won one. Because you do have the consulting teachers report and all that stuff backing up the dismissal.

So those were our three demands basically, three central demands, there's lots of other demands. But the three issues we campaigned on which PR consultants told me was one too many, but we wanted some balance. The grading standards, the putting peer review on the table, and class size reduction. Of course we wanted money. We wanted agency shop. Other things too. But you have to organize around something. We did a lot of community outreach on the grading standards. We formed our own blue ribbon taskforce with community and parent and the dean of the college of education, who was a good liberal. He actually pushed back some against too rigorous a standard. But we had a credible broad-based taskforce who recommended a new set of grading standards. So what we brought to the table was that committee's report. It wasn't just union demands. It was a blue ribbon community teacher taskforce that formulated this upgraded standards. We also had our committee report and our proposals on peer review. And we had our class size. Now wanted for the first time specific limits, not just ratios or averages or whatever. So we did things like mass mailing to parents. Boy, that was expensive, because nobody was going to give us computer access to mail, sort and mail third class. We actually had to have teachers give teachers envelopes to address to the parents of their homeroom students, insert the letter, and then we'd put postage on. It cost a lot of money but it was worth it. It really freaked the board out that we were directly reaching to what they considered to be their constituency. We had all kinds of data that

we had put together about class size and it was really horrible. And of course we led with the worst examples of kindergarten class of 40 and stuff like that. We had met with our editorial boards. Certainly worked the media. A lot of news conferences along the way. Different reports and data and stats, community people sometimes with us. First time Cincinnati Enquirer editorialized that they didn't understand why the district wouldn't take us up on this offer of doing peer review, it sounded like a really good idea, the union was willing to play a part policing its own ranks, what the hell is wrong with the board. I had people calling me up saying who did you pay off, because the Enquirer has never editorialized in favor of any union on any issue ever. It was a breakthrough. Interesting thing on that was the superintendent and personnel director, personnel director was a very competent and decent guy, they got it. They thought shit, this is a real serious great offer. Ran into a buzz saw with middle management because they saw both the principals and the subject supervisors saw it as taking away a club that they had to hold over people. So all of a sudden enthusiasm turned into sorry, can't do it. So we had to go public with it. That's when we went public and said we're proposing this and we can't figure out why they don't want to take us up on it.

The grading debate was the most fun though. Because they kept denying it. The superintendent was so lame. Kept saying we don't give grades, the teacher gives grades. We said yeah the teacher gives grades and you pass them anyway. We don't set the standards. Our teachers set their standards of expectations in their classroom. Just kept bullshitting. So we had lots of stuff on the radio talk shows. This was a great topic. I got on all the right wing radio talk shows and loved it – because as long as you're being

antiestablishment, they liked you. Now things are more polarized probably in terms of national ideology, and they would trash me, they wouldn't be so nice to me as one of those horrible liberals that wants to kill babies and stuff. But at that time it was more just like long as you're antiestablishment, including the school board, and you can help us get some controversy stirred up, then we like you. So I used to go on those a lot. As we were getting closer to the contract expiring, we kept raising the ante. In fact before this thing comes to a head, the grading issue gets resolved and taken off the table. At least you know it's going to get dealt with. One radio talk show, WLW, 700 watts. You can hear it in Chattanooga on a cloudy day. I went on there to talk about this, and there was supposed to be somebody from the board coming, they don't show. And so the host said the manager's coming, he's the chief agitator in the station. And he's grabbing the mike saying "where's the school board. We need to get your point of view on this. We want the school board president, he was supposed to be here didn't come, how about anybody on the school board? Hey how about an assistant superintendent? We'll take an assistant superintendent." He comes back and goes "how about the janitor from the school board building?" So they were pissed because the guy stands them up so now they're really on my side. But the best stuff was the calls. We had a teacher call in saying and this is actually this was about the whole dispute. "I quit teaching -- I taught for five years." She was in a good school. College prep school. "But when I got my class list in August and it had 45 kids on it I said I can't -- that's it, I'm out of here." Thank you. Another teacher calls in.

"I don't want to tell you what school I'm in because I'm afraid of retaliation. But what he's telling you is the truth. My principal last spring, he met with all the third grade

teachers, he asked us to give him our list of what students we thought should be retained. He took the list and looked at it and said that's too many. Downtown won't like it. Then he took the students' sheets and dealt them into two stacks. And one stack passed and the other stack was retained."

We did not plan these calls. Once you get it out and the buzz going you don't really have to plan them. Then we sensed we could probably move in for the kill and this was just December. Contract's not even up. We typically took six months after the expiration to get a contract. Because there were a lot of things we wanted, we had to agitate, they weren't ready to give in, we never got contracts on time. But to me that wasn't really the point where it was your tactical advantage. So December we said let's at least bring one issue to fruition. People keep saying get an ad, why don't we take an ad in the paper. Well my PR advice is radio ads, better buy. More so even then before Clear Channel had a monopoly. You want to reach the most people, radio ads. And they taught me to do three things in one week. So that you couldn't really escape our message. Mailing home, radio ad, and news conference on something related. So I had learned some rudimentary techniques. How to run a really low-budget but high-impact campaign. But teachers keep saying we want to do an ad. We should do an ad in the paper. And it's ridiculously expensive. Not a good use of your money. But that's what they wanted to do. So we came up with the idea, all right, so they want to do an ad, what if we make up the ad, pass it around the schools, and take up a collection. Like the ad, they'll contribute. So we come up with an ad. We take an actual student's report card. Remember, the superintendent's denying that they're promoting people that shouldn't be promoted or overriding teachers. This is an actual Cincinnati public school kid's report card in middle school. The kid had failed all the academic subjects. Reading, math, science and social

studies. Passed gym and music. Something like that. And was promoted. Big stamp on it. Somebody got ahold of it. Went and got a report card. We blacked out the kid's name and the school. But it still had the Cincinnati public school logo. And we just blew this thing up. And we did a half-page ad. Even in 1984 it cost $4,800. We had this big headline saying a Cincinnati this is a real public school report card. I don't even remember what the hell it said. It spoke for itself. Teachers didn't decide these things. The district did. Or something. And the morning that ad ran. I think we probably collected about two thirds of what it cost in the schools. The morning that ad ran, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction was on the phone by 8:00 saying we'd like to get your committee together with our committee and see if we can work out some new grading standards. But that was after a big buildup. Then to bring it to a head.

So January/February comes. We know we're winning a lot of public support but that all by itself won't get us a contract. So now comes to the point where you marry militancy and professionalism. Now comes the point where you got to do something to bring it to a head. But now hopefully we created a climate where the goal was to have teachers feel like instead of being unprofessional to strike, it's the only professional thing to do, because these demands are things that are good for kids. And that you built up enough community support where they again feel validated and the board feels more threatened. So I was very disciplined because again the strike reluctance was loud and clear, and including in the AFT poll they did for us. So I never said anything about a strike. I was not going to be the one to bring it up because I had the reputation of being the militant one, so I never uttered the word. The militants would bring it up, and I'd say: no, we're

doing a different strategy this time; we're really going out, getting community support, we're going to outflank the board that way. I was going to have to be dragged kicking and screaming into any kind of traditional militancy. But come after the first of the year, OK, it's like time to bring this to a head. Well what if we did something like a one-day strike? But we don't even call it a strike? And with a whole lot of community people in support around us? We're not going to do it on Friday or Monday, so think we're just looking to extend the weekend? We'll do it midweek, call it a march and rally for better schools? Never use the word strike in any of our materials? We lined up various ministers and various community leaders and political people that were going to march with us and be on the podium and speak? Along the way, one of our usual tactics was how many bureaucrats do they have and so we were going to release one balloon for every bureaucrat in the central office. Which was a lot in those days. That caused some flak actually on the environmental side. That was a new issue then. But and we ran ads and did more mailings and outreach in the week leading up to it. But the ad, the radio ads I think were pretty effective. It said for the last year the teachers have been trying to negotiate a contract with the board. Trying to get them to raise academic standards, trying to raise teacher quality, higher quality standards for teachers and reduce outrageous class sizes and all this time the board's not been listening to us. Yet we've continued to teach and work and do our jobs. But not on Thursday. On Thursday we feel we have to demonstrate our concern for quality and we're inviting parents to bring your students and join us and we invite the community to join us. Big debate was should we encourage kids to come. We don't want to encourage kids to come except with their parents. So the message was parents, love to have you with us. Feel free to bring your

students. God knows how many would really have shown up. We did have some good community support lined up. This whole campaign was called bargaining for better schools. We used that slogan consistently. We had signs printed. Some of my favorite union artifact is bargaining for better schools signs. These looked like a picket sign but didn't say strike on it, didn't say anything except bargaining for better schools and the name of the local. Those were going to be our strike signs. So we settled 6:00 that morning and got the class size limits which was the toughest thing in terms of the financial commitment they were making. But came up with a pretty creative approach to enforcing those limits within to create, to put some limit on the cost and minimize the number of grievances. Because their big thing was cost and God knows how many grievances every time. So we came up I really think a very creative approach. It was our first joint labor management committee that had real teeth and that administered this whole part of the contract actually to manage it within a finite set of resources and also minimize to almost zero the grievances that have to go through the typical grievance pipeline. But we got class size limits. We got the grading promotion standards that we wanted. A trick we used again later on discipline in a bifurcated way. Meaning we're not going to sit here and insist that you put the actual academic standards in a collective bargaining contract, because you can legitimately say there are other stakeholders that aren't at the table, parents, students, etc. So what we do is you agree to adopt these new standards as board policy. What we put in the contract is that we have a right to apply and enforce the district's academic standards in our classrooms and you can't change my grade and you can't promote a student that I've retained. Unless you go through an academic appeals panel, which we're going to create here in the contract with two

teachers and two principals from another school. And they can review my grade book. They can ask me for samples of students' work and they can override me, but you can't. Guess how often the principal wanted to go actually make a case as opposed to just arbitrarily change it. Almost never. So if you caught them, they might still try to sneak, but if you caught them at it, challenged them, they backed off after that because they don't want to have to go justify it. So we got that and we got decent raises. I think we got three 8s that year because we were still playing somewhat catch-up with years of high inflation, low or no raises. And we got the peer review program. So it was pretty much a total victory. They don't come that often, but it was like a total victory. And really turned a corner in terms of the union's image and what kind of issues that we were focusing on. The postscript is I call off the strike, call off the big big leverage that we've built up. Then there's the inevitable editing. And getting the final document actually prepared. So Sunday afternoon I think it was I went to their lawyer's house and the lawyer -- this is big defeat for him-- he'd been their labor lawyer for a long time. But he wasn't evil, he wasn't from the really antiunion firm in town, he was from their lesser cousin, but we beat his ass. In fact he lost the business after this. Later became a big aficionado and trainer for interest-based bargaining, did like a total transformation. In this case we just had to beat his ass because it wasn't any choice. So we go to his house. He tries to snatch some kind of face-saving victory. He puts in front of me language on class size. There wasn't anything like what we agreed to. It was like going back to their previous last proposal. Basically ratios and bunch of bullshit, wasn't the class size limits at all. I'm like you got to be kidding, you may think that we called off that action, we can't put it back together. I got news for you, we'll put it back together, take six months.

Whatever it takes. We'll put something else together. This is just bullshit. Meanwhile my kid is with me. He was then four. Rambunctious running around. And this guy had kids but they weren't there. But he told my son play with their toys. So he comes running into the room. We're around the dining room table. He comes running in with a plastic gun, points it at the board's attorney, says stick 'em up. No. He says give me all your money. Literally says give me all your money. And the board lawyer says "Sorry, your dad already took it all." (laughter) We became on good terms years later. Because he took a change. But that was just too much.

Q: Let's take a break on that. OK, we left off at….

A: '85 settlement.

Q: '85 settlement.

A: Culmination of bargaining for better school campaign. Well actually that is really a textbook case of that victory ushering out the era of adversarial bargaining, getting ourselves established as a powerful as well as credible voice. And ushered in ten years of interest-based bargaining a la I would still consider the first class version which is the Harvard original version. That happened on the way to the next contract. It was just getting out there on the circuit I think too in education. Both the district treasurer and myself, we both within a few months of each other attended a workshop at our different organizational conferences on this new win-win bargaining or actually what the Harvard people call principled negotiations. I'd swear it was like almost the same meeting at the same time we like we're just starting to have some preliminary -- Oh because meanwhile they got rid of the lawyer and made him the chief negotiator because we had established definitely the best working relationship we had with anybody in the administrative

hierarchy because he was their point man working with the community to pass levies. In the '80s the track record of passing levies became much better. Whole new approach to community engagement was taken on. He was smart about the numbers and could explain the numbers to people but also was just a guy that had a good persona and the community people liked him. Superintendent at this point was much more of an aloof…she had very much of a schoolteacher persona, but in a very old school way. She wasn't good at the community engagement. Certainly wasn't good at teacher engagement. So they decided since this was the money guy anyway and this was the guy we got along with best, and the board had confidence in him too, that they would make him the chief negotiator. I don't remember what extent he talked to them about the bargaining process that we should use, but we both came up with an idea at about the same time. And so we actually did get -- I think they got some corporate funding, maybe some foundation funding, got the Harvard folks in and did the full-fledged weeklong training and then sequestered ourselves and spent months it seemed like -- I think it probably was months -- of intense identifying problems, coming up with problems, options, evaluating the options eventually a long drawn out process but in '88 we really came out with the broadest contract that we had ever gotten. When I say broadest, meaning even in '85 with this big victory you start out with a whole wide range of proposals, including in a big school district you've got subsets of membership that have problems that they want you to address. The learning disability tutors. The school psychologist. The occupational therapist. The music teachers, whatever. Very legitimate issues that you bring to the table. But given that you're trying to develop leverage, and if your leverage is traditional tactic like a strike or whether your leverage is

a PR campaign, you end up with a handful of issues being in the forefront, and that's what is creating the excitement. That's what's putting the pressure on by whatever means ends up getting behind those handful of high-profile issues. Once those are settled, you're done. And that was the case in '85. We won big victory but we left a lot of issues on the table.

So the biggest advantage of this interest-based bargaining process was if they're going to at all engage in it, if they're going to not just bastardize it, they have to engage, with all the issues that you bring, and you have to engage with issues they bring. The result was the broadest settlement ever in terms of a range of issues, including subgroup issues that were resolved. As you know we did get, as a result the mobilization with educational issues, our membership really went up. That certainly is the case for dealing with professional issues, helping you to reach different segments of the bargaining unit that you may not have been reaching with traditional stuff. We got our membership up from below 50% in '79 to 85% on a voluntary basis by '88. Then we got agency shop. Lot easier to convince the school board they ought to coerce 15% freeloaders than if you're barely cracking 50 or 60 and you're asking them to coerce a whole lot more people. So that was done in '88.

We got the teacher improvements in teacher workload in terms of the number of teaching periods, the number of prep periods, especially a big boost for the high school teachers. We improved our salary index considerably. That is more a bigger boost for the experienced teachers that were lagging behind other districts. By that point our starting

salary was very competitive. But veteran teachers were still behind many other districts in the county. I don't know if I mentioned, but when I was elected, we were dead last in the county in both starting and maximum salary, out of 32 districts. So it was a long haul, but we eventually got to at or near the top, depending on which step you were on. And we got there faster. Compressed the index over a couple of contracts.

Q: This was in the ten-year period.

A: Well, yeah, pretty much. I would say in the '90s it was more like keep up. I would say probably the last settlement where we significantly fooled with the index and stuff was '91. So that big increase in the early '80s and now we were getting 8s. We were changing the index so we were boosting people up to the top more. Than one year we came in and chopped off a step. To make a beginning salary. The people were starting with beginning salaries. To recruit better. We chopped a step off the bottom to do that for ourselves.

Q: Eliminating steps?

A: We did. We compressed some steps at the top. We eliminated one at the bottom. At least one. Of course teachers would typically say add more steps. Because the ones who were plateaued out, they want you to add more steps. We really worked hard on talking them out of that. That's really not what you want. That's just making you wait for your money longer. What you want to do is put the money in the existing steps. You're only going to get so much money. So put it in the existing steps. We didn't stick to that in totally pure way. We had longevity increments. We boosted the existing steps rather than add steps. We actually cut some steps off. So basically we had you to the top in ten years, whereas other districts was like 12, 16. And plus maybe some longevities further

along. We did boost both longevities of 17 and 22. Another contract, we boosted those considerably. And we added a Step 27. It's the only one we ever added. Just frankly to help the final years and retirement formula. But we did a lot for the salary schedule as well as getting very good across the boards throughout the '80s and into the early '90s. But I'd say by the early '90s we had gotten ourselves at or near the top, depending on the step. At master's and ten years we were top. Because other people took longer to get to their top. That was a very significant accomplishment.

Forgetting all the other issues, this union and I'm no means taking all the credit, tons of people worked their asses off including the people who helped me figure out all these numbers and the people who provided the backup and did all the community outreach and all that. But we did make like as unions have done in lots of other places, took teachers from genteel poverty to true members of the middle class. Over a fairly compressed period of time.

We even got in '88 lots of these different subgroup issues were addressed. Nonetheless, we come out with a settlement -- oh I'm sorry. We got the career ladder. That was where we built on the foundation of the peer review program and established this four-tier career ladder and reason I say built on is that the '80s were a time when everybody was talking about career ladders, master teacher programs. There was a statewide program in Tennessee that got a lot of ink. There was a countywide program in Fairfax County, Virginia. There were others. Virtually none of them lasted. And they floundered on either one of two things or both. No credibility in how the master teachers were selected

or who did the selecting. And funding was unreliable because it wasn't embedded in a contract. The program wasn't shaped to meet local needs and it wasn't embedded in the contract. So in Fairfax, they got something I think fairly accepted by teachers, and they all went through one round of jumping through all the hoops you're supposed to jump through to move up on this career ladder. Then the county supervisors, in the second round, didn't fund it. Soon as more significant number of people were jumping through the hoops, well you're never going to get teachers to jump through them hoops again. Because you fooled them once. Then Tennessee floundered basically on supervisors from other districts were coming in to tell you who was master teachers in the district. It's not professionally credible. But once you've digested the concept of peer review and worked on the mechanics of the credibility of it, now you've got a basis for determining who can be a lead -- we call them lead teacher. As well as other points on the continuum. Being part of the evaluation. That makes a huge difference. So that was negotiated in '88, implemented in '91. The other thing that was significant about it compared to other career ladders is we wanted it to be an Aztec pyramid instead of an Egyptian pyramid. In other words there's really not much point in creating a career ladder which allows teachers to aspire to some kind of advanced professional status, more responsibility, more pay, opportunity to play a leadership role, without having to leave the classroom or leave teaching and become an administrator, there's no point doing all that if the pyramid is so narrow that only a handful of people can really aspire to that. It's not going to do much good.

So our goal of our career ladder was we had goals in common with the other attempts during that era, which was certainly to give more of those opportunities for advancement and chance to make more money, but we also wanted to have an impact on how the school system was run. We wanted to give teachers a much greater voice in the professional decisions, leadership within the district. So we wanted a flat top pyramid and we specifically set a goal, which seemed like a real stretch in 1991, to have lead teacher positions equal to 10% of the bargaining unit. Which would have been at that time about 350 people. And we did get there. That took another -- took till late '90s to get there. A lot of budget ups and downs. Actually having to cut back on positions that were funded at times and then try to get them back as the budget cycle goes up. But we did get up and I'm pretty sure they're still at or close to that 10%. So it's a significant leavening of the district. Staffing with lead teacher positions.

Q: Was this career ladder also for Paras?

A: We didn't represent paras unfortunately. We kept trying to find ways to do that by working with the university. We did have a program for a while that was too small-scale and didn't last because we didn't have as much control over it because we didn't represent them. AFSCME never showed a lot of interest in it. So that potential to really tap the talent and develop more paras into fully licensed teachers has never really been tapped in Cincinnati unfortunately.

But what I was going to say is despite this very broad contract, more people's issues resolved than ever before, it wasn't that it was close, but there was a higher proportion of no votes than we had seen on a contract in a long time. Because the process was so new

to people. That some people assumed that if we got this much without raising a lot of hell obviously we could have got more if we had raised a lot of hell. Because they're not there, they didn't experience the process to believe that we sweated out of them things we've never been able to get before because they got committed, invested in this process. But it was definitely a turning point. We stuck with interest-based bargaining for a decade. Until the last I guess the last two contracts that I bargained, it reverted to adversarial. Maybe the last one. When was that?

Q: '99?

A: Yes. It was only the last one, and that was because the school board at that point decided we were getting too much out of it. They had forgotten what it was like before. Memories are short. Or they felt cocky enough to think they could, in an adversarial process, they could do better than their predecessors had. It was time to rein us in, take us on, all that did is lead to ugliness and they didn't accomplish any of their objectives. At least I don't think they did.

Q: Then after this '87 contract, the union went further with cooperation with the university?

A: Yes. Again we were trying to take this career ladder notion and take it back to pre-certs or pre-licensure. Obviously it's an issue lots of people have talked about and lots of people have tried to deal with inadequate preparation both in the sense of pedagogical training that's not reality-based, it's not job-embedded, it's not connected to real school. Inadequate in some cases subject matter background, trying to recruit teachers without them really becoming historian first. Before they become a history teacher.

So there was lots of writing about after the Carnegie Report, which we used as actually we really did use the Carnegie Report as our blueprint for this profession-building we were slowly, steadily doing through bargaining. There was also a Holmes Report, which talked about revamping teacher education. Although written in a lot of academicese it was pretty sound in what they were talking about. So we did. We worked with University of Cincinnati, pretty enlightened dean at the time. The district unfortunately was the most passive partner in this three-way partnership. It was very difficult to get them really engaged. But we created I think a really pioneering program that I still think was the way it was structured was really powerful and sustainable. But it proved to be very difficult to sustain as an outlier. It was a five-year program. It still exists. I don't mean to use it in the past tense. But it's diminished in scope from what it once was, and a much more traditional dean who's a bean counter is now running the UC College of Ed.

But what we did is we said we need more subject preparation, we want to move the pedagogical training to a clinical school-based program, at least for its final stages, much more serious than just a ten-week student teaching where somebody else is standing over your shoulder or sitting in the back of the room so the kids behave and all that. And we had to figure out how to make -- they had to revamp their curriculum at the university obviously. We had to make room for this function within schools. So we knew that every school wouldn't be interested or capable of doing that and making the commitment to it to become the equivalent of teaching hospital. We had to have schools apply and become part of it. They got extra lead teacher and career teacher allocation, extra rich staffing, in order that they be well equipped to help the interns develop their skills.

So the fifth year is a paid yearlong internship. Where they have real responsibility for classroom but only for half a day, which is probably all they're ready for, and so that they have time to finish coursework or work on other research that they need to do for their degree. The folks in an internship would be surrounded by a team of lead and career teachers who would help guide them, work with them. In order to make this viable financially to pay them, they had to do real work. Obviously there wasn't the money floating around to – (phone call)

Q: OK, we were just talking about --

A: Yeah, just to finish up, so the program was a five-year program, yearlong paid internship. What we had to do is take one real teaching position and capture it and put it aside for these intern slots. So two interns filled one teaching vacancy and they got 50% of a beginning teacher salary. They taught half a load. The main cost of the program was actually incorporated into the district's regular budget and allotment of teachers to a school. Then there was tuition waivers for some of the teachers who were lead teachers or career teachers that worked with -- and some stipends for them as well -- the interns. So there was some additional cost, but the price is that you have to have the political support to get teachers and the school to understand that position's got to be set aside. So along comes a budget cut. The school's going to lose two positions. Other teachers have to go and we're still going to keep that intern slot and that's when the rubber hits the road and that's when things get a little tense. I tried to explain, OK if we're going to be a profession we have to have our own version of the teaching hospital. And at the teaching hospital if the budget gets cut you can't say well let's just quit having med students or

interns and residents. That's really part of our function. We can't let it go. But it was tough. That was hard, but not the hardest part. The hardest part was keeping the district's interest and in the end the hardest part was you seem uncompetitive because you can still get a certificate in four years down the road. People didn't quite appreciate it as much as we'd like the fact that they would be much better prepared to enter the classroom. But the people who went through it actually swore by it terms of feeling that they were much better prepared than the average new teacher. That was the idea, filling out the career ladder at the bottom end. Then we also had some of our lead teachers becoming adjunct faculty at the university to try to work on the top end. My view is at least we got to create a profession where being a professor of education is one of the top rungs on the career ladder, and maybe you should have to have taught for a lot of years before you start teaching other people how to teach.

There's such a disconnect between the people who do educational research and teach people how to teach and the actual practitioners in the schools. So we were trying to bridge that at both ends. That was in the early '90s. The other big battle we fought…I can't say exactly when it started, but I want to say the beginning of the '90s. Was we were starting to push for some form of school-based management and shared decision-making. We were inspired by Dade County's efforts, and by Rochester's agreement. We were also warned by Chicago's version of decentralization that did not give a strong role to the professionals. We were bringing this to the table. Not getting a lot of traction. The superintendent was at that time again very professional but very traditional and she climbed up to be superintendent, why she should share that authority a lot with teachers.

But the more complicated factor was we weren't the only ones to notice that other districts around the country were experimenting with decentralized site-based management. Community groups were also noticing this, and there was one in particular.

End of Audiofile #3

Tom Mooney Interview Part 4

A: A community-based group that began pushing for site-based management but in more Chicago style. The board felt, I guess, some pressure from both flanks and put together a task force to look at this. The task force was very broad-based. I was on it and I had to go to ever meeting to keep our views in there, but lots of community people and parents, the push was, clearly, for a site-based council that looked like the Chicago version, that would have some teaching and nonteaching employer representation but more parent community. We couldn't win that battle so what we focused on was getting some representation but more focusing on the role.

What came out of that process was something called the -- I call it putting the chemical name of the toothpaste on the package instead of a brand name. It's called the LSDMC, Lucky Strike Doesn't Mean…(laughter) no it means 'Local School Decision-Making Committee.' We tried to suggest school site council or local school council or something, nope they wanted that and they were making the decision so that was an end to that.

Actually, the way that came out was it didn't close the door to more professional involvement in school-level decisions that were appropriate for the professionals involved. They approve the school budget, they approval annual goals for the school, and the participate in the selection of principal when there is a vacancy by interviewing candidates sent to them by the superintendent and making recommendations as to who they want. That was fine. That was a long haul to get to that point where we were able to sort of limit it to that.

Then, we went to the table in the mid '90s -- that would have been '88 to '91 – probably the contract that followed so roughly '94 or '95, we got in instructional leadership teams that have a majority of teachers, some nonteaching employee representation, principal, and a representative of this LSDMC, who cannot be a teacher and most represent one of the other constituencies.

That thing has a lot of power. It recommends the budget; it develops and recommend to the LSDMC, but it deals with things like instructional practices, discipline, allocation of funds for instructional supplies within the school, and schedules.

The team-based school has even more power because they organize the school. They decide master schedules, and they organize the teams. The teams then, slate the kids into classes within that grade level or within that team. The ILT, unless they let the principal just take back control, by virtue of the contract language, is the internal team, that's what it is.

So, we have a two-tiered structure for local school decision-making and I really like it. We backed into it by trial and error and through running up against obstacles and having to find a way to incorporate other people's interest, we end up with a school site council where – just like an outside board of directors, dominated by the outside directors, that does the broad policy and helps pick the principal and I would let them fire the principal. Well not fire him but say you are not going to be principal of our school anymore. We proposed that a couple of times along the way.

Then, we have an internal leadership team that is a majority of professionals and that makes professional decisions on professional issues.

Actually, I think we found a balance that gets everybody at the table and it seems to work pretty well. It takes maintenance, like any other structure, ongoing training, and there hasn't been enough of it and it doesn't work well in every school, but I think it's a good structure.

Q: What are some of the criticisms of that?

A: Well I don't know. One of the reasons why I think it's a good structure is because it has been pretty durable. It doesn't generate a lot of flack.

The LSDMC is much like the ILT, either structure works well when there are activists in the community that help organize people to serve on it. It just ends up being a rubber stamp for the principal when you don't have an organized community base to feed the

people end of it. The same is true with the ILT, inside the building, if you don't have an active union chapter, or if your union members aren't organized at the school, then they won't have a strong representative body either. Just as you get people's names on there, the principal may be just running it, if there is not a constituency that's active and those representatives are reporting back to, so, you have to take advantage of instruction. Where they are functioning to various degree in all buildings, there' been some balance struck and you don't get a lot of flack from any direction.

Q: The AFT has definitely taken an eye on you and they ask you to run for council in '94?

A: They didn't ask me. (laughter) I put my name in three times before I got elected. I got elected in '92, so it would be '88 I guess, was my first shot at seeking the progressive caucus nomination.

My first convention was all the way back in '78, I believe, in Boston when the PL took over the stage and Randi had to tackle and beat some of them down. It was wild.

I went right for the international affairs committee and I was pushing some Irish issues at the time, and found Tony McCann, who became my chief collaborator. He is retiring this year. He was long-time president of the Shenendehowa local outside of Albany. My cousin works in the district, now. That's Kathleen's father.

I met him in that international affairs committee and it became a whole family friendship developed. Also I gravitated, initially, to the United Action Caucus. I didn't know anything about AFT politics, but certainly had a lot of admiration for Al. But didn't

know a lot of issues that get debated at conventions and this seemed like one of the more rebellious groups so I naturally gravitated to them. I was also a fan, at that point, of the secret ballot, and later, there was a secret ballot caucus that was independent of the United Action Caucus and I was involved in that for awhile.

I think there were two conventions that I stayed involved in the United Action Caucus because here is what happened. I noticed, of course, that Shanker was kind of red-bating them either explicitly or a little more subtly or other people that were close to him were doing so, and I was skeptical of that. That was a tactic that I associated with McCarthyism and I thought it was terrible.

I spent a lot of time in these United Action Caucus meetings where we would be debating what our position should be on every resolution before the convention. So, this took hours and hours of deliberation and contention there were people with a lot of debating skills, problematic skills and maneuvering, within the room that had maybe had at its peak, in my time at the convention, maybe 40 people. That would be really peak.

Of course, I thought this was dumb because if you wanted to organize opposition or you wanted to organize around an issue, pick one, two, or at the most, three issues and go out and argue. We should have been out at the parties that all the delegations are having and organizing around some issue instead of sitting here for hours evening debating the fine points of every resolution before the convention. So, I thought they were clearly, tactically not very together.

What really drove me out of there was getting up one morning and going to the convention floor and they used to have troops in those days, passing out a newsletter, so they are passing out a packet for the United Action caucus, with a newsletter and a sheet on where we stand on different constitutional amendments, and within the packet, and I think it was even wrapped around it, I think it was like the first thing you saw, was a pamphlet entitled 'The Soviet Union, an ally for Peace.' You know what, we didn't vote on that. We did not debate that. We did not decide, collectively, that we were going to include that in the packet, but of course, that becomes the real label, the real positioning, the real…here's who we are. I said, OK, well Al was right on that.

It was very clear in the room that there were various left factions, including CP people. I can detect the stuff. I still wasn't sure there was a total front.

Q: Until they had wrapped in a paper bag for you.

A: Once I got out of that, I took part in the secret ballot committee, which was not a caucus of any candidates, but just around the issues.

Once you are running a local and you elect delegates and are paying their way, you do think kind of know that I came around on that position, too. These are not individual voters, these are representatives of other people.

I joined the progressive caucus, I can't remember exactly when, but it was in the early '80s. So, in '88, I put my name in, again in '92 and made finally made it in '92.

Q: What was the environment for the AFT convention during the '80s? You had Reagan in LA,…

A: I had my one-year-old son with me at that convention. I wasn't going to go, as a matter of fact, because unfortunately, I was already divorced and I had my son for a month and I wasn't going to go. Then, two things happened. They actually asked me to do a workshop, probably on bargaining for better schools campaign, and Al decided to invite Reagan, which was very controversial, of course. I figured there was going to be some action around that I didn't want to miss.

So, I went to the convention, got a baby-sitter who didn't speak any English, didn't matter because my son didn't, either, but he did walk. He was one of these kids who really wanted to walk before he cared about talking. My daughter is just the opposite. I remember coming back to the hotel room and she had moved the furniture to block the windows. She was chasing him around and he was happy as a clown.

I took him to the floor sometimes in a little backpack and we did walk out on Reagan together, him in his little backpack. I just couldn't do otherwise.

The other thing in the '80s, of course, the professional issues coming to floor in mid to the late '80s and I was really very on board with Al, including his watershed '85 speech. That was right after the Carnegie report. It was all fitting together for me. This was AFT to say on this Carnegie report, we felt we had a blueprint for creating a profession out of the

group of professionally-trained employees of a bureaucracy. But, it was also a time of debates on Central America and I missed the Vietnam debates in the AFT, but it seemed like somewhat of a replay in terms of the forces at work.

Despite, at that point, being the progressive caucus and supporting leadership in general on nearly all of their issues, I was very much against aid to the contras and didn't think we ought to be supporting the butchers that were running El Salvador at that time. That put me at odds with at least the foreign policy apparatus of the AFT at that time. I had a lot of good, respectful debates with some friends and staff, and elected officials on those issues but we just didn't always agree.

Q: Was the usual arguments, we are trying to defend free trade unions against the left-leaning parties?

A: The gorilla movements were really communist-led and they were going to impose totalitarianism, if they wanted to, and there wouldn't be free trade unions, but my whole view of that is that the US made a lot of mistakes in the '50s through the '80s and a big chunk of the labor movement went along for the ride because they saw every single struggle as nothing but overwhelming as an extension of the US-Soviet struggle. They failed to take into account that there were many cases where people were really rebelling against either colonialism, like in Portuguese Africa, or local oppressive elites or whatever trying to make their own destiny and maybe some faction taking aid from wherever they could get it, but that didn't mean the whole thing boiled down to us versus them. It also didn't mean that some of these local elites were worthy of our support.

There may even be some cases where there is nobody that you would really want to get behind and invest blood treasure and your national reputation.

So, it wasn't that I necessarily thought every gorilla movement -- well I did once upon a time, but not in the '80s -- was a good gorilla movement, and some of them, no doubt, were. I think we made huge blunders in places like Nicaragua, where you probably could have co-opted the Sandinistas in places like El Salvador, where you have a whole bunch of elements of this. You could have worked with some factions of and try to gain influence over the long haul, but to support the people who are butchering nuns and assassinating archbishops, I couldn't do that.

The other thing, as far as how this played out in the AFT is, I feel that the left was a total disaster on this. They were just so incredibly and so inept and bumbling.

Q: Is this still run by the United Action Caucus?

A: No at this point, the United Action is barely alive and weren't a significant force.

You had a few people whose left politics that were very embedded in the local and played a role in the local. More often, you had people getting themselves elected delegates who were really solidarity activists, who thought groups that they were part of, which was fine, going and getting themselves elected so that they could come to the convention and raise these issues, which is also fine. You just wish they would do a would do a little homework before they started improvising. So, there really wasn't any real political

cohesion among them and they just bumbled. I would sometimes try to give tactical advice, but it was mostly helpless, so I couldn't do much about it.

I do remember one moment when I was helping out whatever group was organizing an event, during a lunch break, it was somebody from the El Salvador Teachers union, I am not sure, it was either Nicaragua, or El Salvador. I volunteered, like an idiot, to try to get up to the mike before lunch break and with the flyers going around to announce it. Well, Al, right before he breaks for lunch, he's up at the mike, up at the podium, waving one of these flyers around and flat out says, "These people are people…" something to the effect that the people in this union, -- this is a communist union, or communist-led, or something to that effect. (laughter). Well Ok, here I am to test my moral backbone. I did make the announcement, though.

That was an honest disagreement with people whom I otherwise had very many more areas of agreement with and I don't think there was a total right or wrong on either side.

El Salvador looks like a place where the right won, both countries do, really, and I don't know if that's good for the working class or teachers or education, public education or anything else. I still don't think we were on the right side.

Then, now, speaking more broadly, the US foreign policy, Angola. We got some serious answering to do for having supported two different gorilla movements against the main gorilla movement that was struggling for independence because we thought the main

gorilla movement was too left, and how many years of civil war resulted from that and how many people had to die and how much did that destroy the infrastructure so that a lot of people died of diseases, that they shouldn't have died of and are still ignorant and illiterate because they weren't making schools, there is no justification for that. History will very harsh on those who supported the Norabutos and the other asshole, Jonas Savimbi so I think a lot of mistakes were made and I think sometimes, labor went to readily along for the ride.

Q: When you joined the international committee as a representative of CFT, and then when you came back to your local, were there questions about why are you involving yourself with international work when you could be talking about our collective bargaining or teachers and education?

A: I don't think there were any more questions about that any other committee I left town to serve on. It was more just why is he out of town again? No doubt that I straddled the limit of what was either responsible, in terms of getting my work done at home, or politically viable to do. But I really believe the national union is important, and I think that becomes increasingly clear as time goes on, in terms of the federal education just gets bigger every year -- it's almost not even debatable now. Some people you still have to explain why it's important. I do think the national union plays a terribly important role in supporting, and it always has, in terms of supporting locals and state federations but also in helping to try to set the tone, nationally, to create some covering fire for us to try to win friends and influence people at the local and state level. The national union stands for the right thing and of course, this is why Al and Sandy's leadership was so crucial on education, which did us so much good at the local level. It was something to point to,

this is what we are for, we are trying to improve things. I didn't have any problem in my own mind, trying to justify it. Sometimes, it was challenging trying to explain.

I don't think the international affairs committee was any more or less -- especially to the extent that you were really doing work. Like after I went and I did two stints as an election observer in Chile, we had an opportunity to host some leaders of the Chilean Teachers Union in Cincinnati. People loved that. People could really relate to that, that we were part, in some small way at least, least, trying to get rid of their dictatorship.

Q: So, you were down in Chile during the No Plecibe?

A: Yup and then again for the first presidential election after that.

Q: What was the first trip down to Chile like?

A: They knew I was crazy and adventurous, so they sent me to the most right-wing region. It was region 9, headquarters based in Temuco, south central Chile and the town of Temuco was OK and they voted no, but the region voted yes. It was the only region that voted yes. So, we went out into the region it was Araucania country and places where they had the big estates that the Miristas tried to stage takeovers at, in some cases. It was patrons that ruled with an iron fist and bused their workers into the town to vote and everybody believed that the patron would know how you voted, and even in the town that was big. We spent we spent a lot of time talking to people about the process and they really won't know how you voted.

Q: You were trying to teach them democracy at that moment of practicing democracy?

A: Well, yes and no, because they actually could teach us a lot. They had a long history in voting. That's what stood them in good stead when they finally got the opportunity

because they had a long history and a well-established way of voting and one where the votes are counted right here, right now. So, they don't get lost on the way down to the board of elections or whatever. They have observers from every party. It was a very good process, observers from every precinct and every party. A lot of teachers were election judges and election observers, but they were the administrative people running the elections. In small towns, you found somebody educated enough to do that and teachers are disproportionately represented.

Then, they counted the votes right there in front of all the observers from the various parties. Every party representative is calling or faxing results to a city or district or regional office and they are all going to Santiago. So, there are five parallel counts going on nationally besides the official count. It would have been very hard to manipulate tat process and get away with it.

The thing that was weird, the guys in the polling places with the big automatic weapons. The folks in town told us that those weren't the guys to be scared of, it was the guys who had the big knives strapped on their hips that you should worry about because they were the riot control detachment.. You wanted to ask what the knives were for and how they wielded them.

That was a great opportunity. I was supposed to go observe the first democratic elections in South Africa, and in the case I had prioritize local work because we didn't have a contract. It was one of those contracts that we would take as long as we had to take to get

a good contract and it was three months into what should have been a new contract and we didn't have settlement and there was no way I could get away for a couple of weeks.

Q: You were finally elected vice-president of the AFT in 1992. How large was the council then, about 30?

A: It wasn't that much, maybe grown a little bit since then. Can't have grown by more than four or five.

Q: What were your first meetings like?

A: I don't remember. I've been to too many of them by now.

Well, the perception from the outside, maybe just being from the opposition, but from the outside, is that things were really controlled because the fact by the time you got to a convention, there was political support generated and organized for at least the major initiatives and resolutions. I was a little bit surprised and pleased by it how much healthy debate there was at council meetings, at least on some things. Of course when you have Al Fondy in the room you are going to have lively debates. I felt like it was a great opportunity and you never felt you didn't have a real opportunity to debate stuff.

The thing you learned when you got closer into Al is that he can be intimidating, not in a mean sense, but just in an intellectual sense, and actually, I'm going to go a little further, he was the only person, since my grandfather died, that I was ever really in awe of. I would get --I've been a mouthy debater since I was very young doing stuff in high school -- I would get tongue-tied around him and not be able to clearly articulate whatever idea was running in my head. It took a long time to get more comfortable.

Eventually, I realized that he liked to argue. He wanted you to argue with him. He didn't have much respect for you if you didn't argue back. So, that was a revelation and I wish I had discovered that earlier on. It's been a great opportunity and experience to be on the council.

Q: Were you ever asked to be on the executive committee?

A: Yeah. Of course, I was happy to be asked, but that was something you don't campaign for, at least, I certainly didn't. That was in New Orleans whatever year that was, the last time I was in New Orleans. That was a big year for me; that's when Sandy asked me to be on the executive committee and chair the PPC, the K-12.

Q: That's was in 1998?

A: Yeah, I don't remember.

Q: What's the difference between the council and the committee?

A: In some ways, it is just a committee of the council that has certain assignments, which is to deal with staffing issues, personnel issues, dues, no that’s not true dues goes through the constitutional amendment committee but we talked about it obviously. So, in some ways it has its turf in terms of committees that have to formulate recommendations for the council and convention, and in some ways, it does talk about overall big-picture stuff. Sometimes it's been AFL-CIO, sometimes it's been NEA relations, merger. I was on the merger bargaining team for the second round that didn't really go anywhere, although it was still interesting.

The last few years, we have been having retreats -- Sandy starting having once a year,. Maybe twice a year retreat, a dinner and a whole day where it isn't just the routine or it's not at all the routine business. So, you get a chance to talk about more general direction. So, that's been a great opportunity.

Q: Do you ever talk about the PPCs? How were they formed? What's the purpose? Has it been successful?

A: I think it's been very successful. The purpose was a combination of some political pressures, I think were you had, during the time I was trying to get on the council, you had a lot of pressures of both up and coming leaders, divisions – they weren't formal division then -- people from nonteaching constituencies wanting more representation, trying to balance that with size of local geography and region, with gender and ethnic representation, so part of it was seen as a chance to get more people involved at the national level, more people understanding and contributing to the policies of the national union. That, in and of itself, was a really good reason.

Part of it was because other constituency people who were on the council got bored of teacher, teacher stuff all the time and felt their issues didn't get enough attention or deliberation. The hope to grow in those other constituencies and wanting to be able to sell, as part of a sell, there is a leadership body in the AFT devoted to your constituency and its issues.

It was a good idea and the timing was right. It was an idea whose time had come and I think it has done pretty much all those things. Some might think the pre-K-12 is too big.

The danger is that instead of a leadership body, it becomes a focus group instead of leadership body. So, you might want to be thinking about being a little more selective. The point is not so much to make sure every single states represented, every single region is represented, every single this, that, and the other – get a little bit of that, but get a group of people who will grapple with the issues and try to lead in some direction.

Overall, I think it worked very well and I enjoyed chairing it. I got a little frustrated in the last couple of years, primarily around NCLB. I just didn't think we were we needed to be on NCLB and when we formally, by resolution, got to where I thought we ought to be, I saw no implementation. I saw a lot of foot-dragging around implementing that new policy. Frankly, I got to the point where I didn't want to front for it anymore. My constituency, my state didn't feel very strongly about it. I think teachers in other states did, too. I think the members of PPC did, but I don't think we were seeing action by the organization reflect the views of the PPC or in fact, what the convention had adopted. I felt like I was out there, perhaps, being taken for granted or asked to front for stuff I really didn't have a real say in.

I think I'm pretty good at being a soldier as well as a leader, in other words, a part of a team, so if I am in the room where the issue is being debated, even if it's a behind-the-scenes kind of room, and I lose the argument, and go forward with a somewhat different policy or tactical approach or battle than I was advocating, I can deal with that, but when I feel like I am not even in a room where the decisions are going to be made, and I am supposed to get up and chair a meeting putting a happy face on it, I find that to be an

untenable position. That's where it got to by last summer. So, that's why I resigned that position. Hopefully, it's not some big split or some big feud.

I am not really mad at anybody in particular. I think it was somewhat a bureaucratic disconnect, too many departments operating in silos. I think there was some foot-dragging, more in the staff than at the leader level, but that's just speculation. I don't really know why it was not moving, but it wasn't moving. That's not a big split or feud, it's something that I think will pass. And move through it

Q. Well I think we are moving on it now with the blog on NCLB and…

A. Still to slow, well not to slow, I mean we are now formulating policies or the proposals for the reauthorization I think are sound. I think the resolution passed at the last convention is just about where we needed to be. There just isn't enough umph behind it, not enough resources being put into it. We did one flight of ads and then we were planning another and that got dropped. So, there is not enough real umph, like it is a real campaign. So I won't say we are not moving in the right direction it just seems we are driving for something

A. Its past three, wanna wrap up.

Q. Yes. Why don't we pick it up next time.

End of Audiofile #4

Tom Mooney Interview - Part 5 – 08-30-2006

Q: This is Dan Golodner, Wayne State University AFT archivist, talking with Tom Mooney, August 30th, 2006, as part of the AFT oral history. We were just going to do a wrap-up from our last interview, and we forgot to talk about your presidency of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. Why don't you just talk about getting in there, and what changes you saw that needed to be done?

A: Well, first of all, as a president of a large local, I was active in the OFT for many years, made a point of it, even when I was not yet president of the CFT, but an officer, I made a point of trying to organize people to come up to the OFT convention, and give CFT a presence.

CFT had not been sending very many people. Our president before me wasn't that interested, it seemed like. Of course we had no money as a local in those days, in the late '70s to pay daily expenses, so I had to kind of organize people to come up mostly on our own nickel. We couldn't afford to stay at the convention hotel downtown, so we stayed out at the Red Roof Inn south of town and ferried in, carpooled in every morning. That was OK; it was ferrying back to the Red Roof in late at night after all the hospitalities that was a little dicey. But we had fun; we always crammed a bunch of people in a room and stuff.

We really early on began to try to push for some changes in OFT. We perceived clearly that a lot of our problem, and this is before charter schools and vouchers came along, but this is just lack of adequate funding, a very dysfunctional, broken school funding system, which is still broken. They've pumped more money into it, but it's still the same poor

distribution and inefficient use and equities. So we were clear that we needed a stronger state organization to try to help address those problems, and that the OFT at the time was what we found was an organization who didn't have a full-time president, that was mostly treated as sort of an arm or an extension of the Cleveland Local, which was the first large local to kind of get established and get bargaining rights and have a solid, dues-paying membership base. Toledo was next, and we were still up-and-coming at the time. So the presidents had been, for a pretty long period of time there, were from Cleveland. They were part-time, we had an organizing staff which slowly morphed into more of a field services staff. We didn't have a full-time lobbyist; we didn't have even a part-time lobbyist. So it was the same federation that when the structure was created that we were looking at was created like in the late '60s, it was mainly about organizing. And that's good, that was probably what needed to be done then. To the credit of the Cleveland members and Toledo, they were largely funding this organizing operation. There was a lot of volatility still, in the representation status of a lot of districts around the state, including some of the other large cities like Dayton and Youngstown, which we came close but didn't quite make it. And in Columbus, we had a feisty but smaller local. So there was just a lot of potential still, before things settled into you're either OEA or OFT pattern that you now find. But, having said that, we had that strength of having a good organization staff. We didn't have the representation in Columbus that existing locals, bargaining locals really needed. So we began to immediately agitate for essentially to raise our dues, in order to get more resources and more strength at the state level. That went on for many years; there were pitched battles, particularly with the Cleveland delegation. Toledo was sometimes dissenting and sometimes along with us, and

sometimes opposing us in raising the dues, depending on whether they were in a cynical mood or a hopeful mood about the potential of OFT to represent them more effectively. But we had fun. Sometimes very ugly battles, but I really learned some lessons about unionism from being active in the OFT in those early days, which we would have literally just ferocious floor fights, and then we would have -- there was an still is a tradition, we have this awards banquet toward the end of the convention which ends with everybody ringing the banquet hall, linking arms, and saying "Solidarity forever." Corny, of course our young activist counterculture types thought it was indeed corny, but you know, it gets to you, it works on you. It actually does mean something, that people were sincere in that feeling of solidarity, even after having disagreed for the previous two days. Pretty strong.

A: AFT did that in the '40s and the '50s. Same thing.

Q: Well, we still do it. Anyway, so we won some victories over the years. It was slow progress, but we were instrumental in getting a full-time president in, and eventually getting a full-time lobbyist. All this took too long, but it needed to get done. We also began to push, early on, for the OFT office to be moved to Columbus, we had more presence here. That took even longer to get done. But we did succeed along the way in getting a building fund going, which the state began to put some money aside so we could ultimately relocate to Columbus.

We literally were up there pushing to raise our state per-capita, pretty much every convention we were fighting that battle. In order to do certain specific things, you've got to get those things on a budget. Of course, we pushed to get the attention of privatization as it began to rear its head, we pushed hard to take that issue up. That wasn't a hard sell,

but somebody had to really be paying attention to it. Eventually, Cleveland became of course very concerned about it, because they were the target for the first voucher program.

The other sort of strand of debate during those years - I'm talking about the late '70s through the '80s -- there were some social issues that our local pushed, and had to find allies of other locals in like the divestment issue. The OFT would have been more on the sort of softer, solvent principles type of approach. Maybe a little because of some underlying, kind of social conservatism, but mainly because of -- there was sort of a sacred doctrine around the retirement systems, "Thou shalt not restrict our ability to invest in the ways that would get the best return, so that we can all secure retirement." They didn't want to hear about any social screen or political screen for those investments, whereas we felt pretty much our local was united around feeling very strongly that there was a line that we didn't want to cross to have more money in our pockets when we retired, at the expense of other people's suffering. Our argument was, "Sorry, we're not buying this." Everybody has a line. Would you invest in, and we deliberately chose this example to sort of underscore the racial dynamic here, would you invest in a white slavery racket that was real profitable, running out of somewhere in Russia to supply hookers to coal mines of Britain, or something? Everybody's got a limit, right? So the question only is, is South Africa -- which a virtual slave system -- over that line? We think it is. So that was a huge debate, I mean it was fierce. The big battle, of course, was Cleveland voted as a unit, under unit rule. The delegation would take a position, whatever that majority position was, they were all bound to follow it. We had to break

that unit rule; we had to engineer or entice delegates to rebel, and we eventually succeeded. Only when they finally split did we pass that. Doesn't mean the retirement system went along with it, but at least we got there.

We had a similar debate about investment in Northern Ireland, which was, I admit, one of my pet causes. In this case, it was not a divestment policy that was being promoted by national initiatives; it was actually the McBride principles, which were more modeled on the solvent principles. It was a different context, different situation, and that was the sort of cutting-edge position; there wasn't a further, stronger position for divestment even out there. But we had the same debate, in that we didn't want to restrict, in any way, our investment policies; only want to focus on maximum return. So here was that strand of social issues that were debated. Once I got to be president of the local -- at some point, we restructured. One of the two elections in my life that I lost was a foolish bid to run for an OFT vice presidency. We have three vice presidents. I was trying to play a stronger role; I wanted to play more of a leadership role in the state organization -- this is again in the '80s sometime. I got beat by somebody from Cleveland. It was a race I just shouldn't have run; I should have been a little more patient.

Then, we restructured OFT so that it looks a little bit more like the AFT structure, so that there is only one vice president, fewer officers, but there's an executive committee that includes the officers, and then appointed members that at least by political tradition now -- intent, initially, would include all the large local presidents, and then a good sampling of the more active presidents from smaller locals. That's the structure we still have today.

So I became part of the OFT executive committee, which really was the leadership, and still is the sort of leadership body. It doesn't have a lot of formal voting power on some very narrow, specific issues, but it in effect is the effective leadership body, because the votes around the table are enough to carry anything through convention by a factor of degrees; assuming their delegates follow them, it'll pass. So again, get even a more active role. I did begin to think about, as at least a possibility, that when President Merrick retires, that's something I'd want to do. I never was real certain about that until it came up, until it became clear he was getting ready to retire.

Increasingly, by that point, we're now in the late '90s, it was more and more clear that our problems were emanating from the state level; the state level was increasingly where the action was, is, in terms of educational policy, and that we really needed a beefed-up state organization badly, as a local, and then I believe the other locals did too. In fact, the way I put it is that we all very clear in the AFT that the NEA around the country missed the moment when the action shifted to the local level, and they built these powerful state organizations to lobby and to run insurance programs and legal services when there wasn't any collective bargaining, and when we got collective bargaining in Ohio and other states, they didn't reorganize and shift the focus and resources to the local level, and that's why we were better, that's why we had a better organizational structure for the needs of local members, especially related to collective bargaining.

Well, I was now arguing, and still arguing, that we're in danger of missing the moment when the action shifted back to the state level. Not that we want to diminish either the

autonomy or the resources or the activity level at the local, but that we need to add capacity in action, and activity and program at the state level, 'cause everything from instructional policy, academic standards, how we're going to measure progress, what the sanctions are going to be if we don't make progress, but certainly the funding and certainly the push to privatize that we're fighting is all coming from the state capital. So that is what kind of got me more interested. Frankly, it really wasn't prior to that the career path I had thought I would follow or intended to follow. Because in the AFT, frankly, traditionally, you have a stronger role as a leader of a mid-size even urban local, you have a more prominent role, had more possibilities of getting on the map and doing stuff. What you could bargain in local contracts, include a lot of educational innovation and reform, seemed, frankly, more important, and certainly more recognized nationally as important. But that was changing. In the '90s, that was changing. It certainly has only accelerated; that trend has only accelerated, I think. In fact, now, it's really the State Feds wrestling for the controls of the train, and which track you're going to take, with the locals being relegated more to an implementation role. Figuring out how to finance the unfunded mandates.

When it became clear Ron was going to retire, decided to take a shot. And one of the dynamics, the small locals, large locals is a major dynamic, as it is in a lot of other states, and Ron, the previous president, had come from a small local, and that was really in a sense a breakthrough, because for the first time, the OFT wasn't just an extension of Cleveland, or wanting to go back to the '60s. We had a strong president from Toledo, Dorothy McPhenny. But it was good for the OFT to have a president from a small local,

it gave the OFT itself more importance, independence, allowed the organization to play a stronger role, and especially to try to meet the needs of all locals. But I felt like I had something to offer, because I had been not just a large local president, but somebody who had for my whole career been focused on trying to build up the state organization. So I ran, got elected, and --

Q: When was that, '96?

A: No, no. That was only in 2000.

Q: Oh, that's right. 2000.

A: It was actually a perfect moment for transition; we had finally begun to move on the relocation to Columbus, and I'd been pushing it and others began to push it and support me for the previous couple years. In the year prior to that election, we formed a search committee to look for a site in Columbus. I was on that search committee, and we were hoping to buy, but looking at rental possibilities too. So literally, right before I was sworn in -- I guess right after I was sworn in -- right before the convention, we picked this building.

And we closed on it, literally, within a couple of weeks after I was installed; I was at the closing, signing the paperwork. Took a year to get it in shape to move in, and I had to try to figure out how to deal with architects, plans, permits, et cetera. And contractors in the city I don't know. If it was Cincinnati I could have figured it out. But even commercial, I had done some residential stuff, but commercial's different. Find the right union contractors, especially.

But we got it done, and so we ended up with -- one of the really first things I had to focus on was getting that long-awaited headquarters in Columbus. Had a big battle then over shutting down the Cleveland office, phasing it out, what to do with staff that worked out of it, whether to keep it as a satellite. Fair amount of internal debate. But it was really just in a sense just a debate about the transition, how to treat some of those staff, particularly the office manager who we offered a position here, but she, because of family issues, wasn't able to come down. She was great, she was a really good employee. Then began to push to expand the presence, in terms of staff here in Columbus. The OFT, when Ron was still president, in '98, we had done sort of watershed retreat, facilitated by AFT, that we called a needs-assessment. I believe that was shortly after the AFT task force on state federations had done its watershed report. Am I right about the timing of that?

Q: Yes.

A: I'm pretty sure we were working from that as a template, even then. We still go back to it, refer to it, and use it to help explain why we need to add capacity in this area, that area, 'cause look, this is what State Feds are supposed to do. But it was new then, and it was still fiercely debated as to what the priority should be, and whether we really wanted to fund them. But we were on course, at the time I came in, we had agreed particularly to privatize, expand the area of educational issues capacity, and to add an educational issues director or coordinator. But I had to go ahead and fill that position. AFT was supporting it on a phase-in, phase-out basis. We had also agreed we wanted to expand legislative, political capacity; we had made the first step of getting some of small locals to start a COPE program, but we needed to expand that. We still didn't have, by the time I took

office, we still did not have a full-time lobbyist. We had a half-time lobbyist who was also a field coordinator with us, sort of half a caseload of locals to service. Well, that was totally unacceptable. But I also knew I wasn't going to get enough dues increase to fund a totally new position. So I took a look at that, and I said, OK, can we take that half-time position and make it full-time just by reorganizing? Which really meant taking a half a dozen locals that were on the caseload and redistributing to the remaining field coordinator. So we went from four and a half field coordinators down to four, in order to make that legislative position full-time. But I also redeployed the person involved, and took advantage of the vacancy to reassign that person to strictly field services, and posted the position, recruited somebody new for the legislative and political action director. So now we have one person dealing with all of legislative and political action, which was still inadequate, but it was a big step forward for OFT.

Began to also try to create an organizing capacity, because really the OFT had sort of gone to sleep on organizing once the no raid agreement came in. We had morphed from the period where again, as I'd mentioned, representation status of locals was still volatile. Once I really began to settle in, we borrowed a page from the Illinois Federation, again back in the '80s. And this was something that Ron Merrick led, which was a smart and good thing and well-done: we began to try to pursue the crossover strategy, and get locals of the association to lock stock and barrel switch their affiliation. We got quite a few new locals that was. We probably would have continued to pick up some, at some reasonable handful here, had that continued. But the no-raid agreement came into play. The downside of that strategy was that we lost the capacity to just organize from scratch;

I guess we had always, in a sense, thought of ourselves as that we were born to raid the association. Although even in 60s, wasn't really raiding, 'cause they weren't even a union, they'd pretend to be. But gradually, it became more a matter of raiding. So we forgot, in a sense, how organize the unorganized from scratch. We had to recreate that capacity, and that's still a struggle. But initially, the first debate we had when I was elected, the very first that really was a hot debate other than how to phase out the Cleveland office, was whether to go back to raiding. I've been complimentary of Merrick, and I generally will always be, but he sort of threw a hot potato at me on his way out the door. Between my election on Friday and being on Saturday noon, a motion was made on floor to terminate our no-raid agreement with the OEA. And he didn't make the motion, 'cause he was chairing, but I'm pretty sure he caused it to be made. (laughter) The mentality in the OFT at that point was still very, F them, they're big, bureaucratic, clumsy and probably worse, and they don't pursue or represent the needs of urban districts, which is where of our members are, and et cetera et cetera. The only reason we had the no-raid agreement in the first place is AFT had it, and we had several locals in transition at the time the national no-raid, the first one, was signed. That is, they were trying to get out of the OEA, and the OEA was throwing every possible legal roadblock, and costing them money and costing us money to fight those battles. This is a little bit of digression, but I think it's interesting, when the national no-raid agreement came to the executive council, and I'm the only vice president from Ohio at that time, 'cause I think Dal had retired -- maybe we were both on it. No, I think I was the only one at that time.

I remember the meeting was in Boston. So here it comes before us. I know my folks at home do not want me to vote for this. I know that, that's obvious. Merrick was still president of the OFT then, 'cause we were still in the process of trying to turn over these locals. But I knew also it was the right thing to do from a national perspective. So what I said is, "I will vote for this only if I can get assurances from the AFT staff and officers that somebody's going to come and help deal with these locals in transition." In other words, this is during the war in Bosnia was still going on, that it's great for folks to sit in Geneva and declare peace in Bosnia, but somebody's got to come to bridge at Mostar and disengage the combatants, or it won't mean anything.

So that was my way out, I suppose, of trying to figure out how to do the right thing, and yet represent my constituency back home. And they came through; they did in fact help with that process, and it became more Merrick dealing with it -- I wasn't as directly involved then. But they did get the OEA to agree to back off the locals that had voted that wanted out, they dropped all their legal challenges and whatever, and those were done. But therefore, one of the tradeoffs was we, then, as OFT, had to begin entering the state level no-raid agreement, we did. But on his way out the door, he arranges for that to be revoked, and hands me the hot potato. Because then, people were thinking, my first meeting, to preside over the OFT executive committee, they're like, "OK! Where we going at 'em? Where we going to go first?" I'm like, shit. So I had to work real hard to try to, and what I wanted to do, coming in, was in fact see if we could turn that relationship around, see if we could take a page from the nationals, and take advantage of that fresh agreement, and the mergers or merger talks that were going on in other states. I

didn't have any hope of any time soon getting a state-level merger here, nor was that even going to be entertained by the OFT leadership. What I was selling, though, because what I believed in was, we have got to figure out how to cooperate on legislative and political stuff, and we also have to figure out, regain the capacity to organize the unorganized. Because actually, raiding was fun, but it wasn't really adding numbers to the labor movement as a whole. That was a hard sell, because they didn't think of the OEA as part of the labor union. It was very traditional, AFT-type thinking. So I spent a lot of energy in my first year trying to sell those two concepts.

I brought in the Michigan president, on the basis of what he had done is, once a no-raid agreement came in, started to look around and say, "Well, maybe there are people who aren't organized at all, at anything, and maybe we can organize them." And they had a great success in the first couple years. I think they added 3,000 members in a couple years. Then I brought in Fondy, sort of a different basis, to talk to them and I knew some of our urban leaders particularly knew Fondy and had a lot of respect for him. Also for Hugh, they had a lot of respect for him as well, especially the Toledo folks. Fondy was selling not organizing, 'cause he hadn't really launched much, but cooperation in the state capital, it was something he believed in strongly, and had claimed a lot of success. So I was trying to get both those perspectives, and we made some headway. These folks have come around a long way.

We then were able to convince them, and this is incremental, but yet another dues increase to fund at least one full-time organizing director, to take charge and look at it

with the landscape, develop a strategy, and figure out how to move us forward. So they've really been supportive; we've done pretty incremental but significant expansion of the capacity of the State Federation. But just back to the OEA strand of the story, so we did go through a series of meetings with them, we achieved a higher level of cooperation, we had a couple of dinners with the executive committees of the OFT and the OEA got together, and things went significantly better for awhile in terms of that relationship. Unfortunately, in the last couple of years, it's gone downhill again. Tensions around retirement system elections, and retirement system issues before the retirement system, including the fact that as of today, as of yesterday afternoon, every member…. The OEA had an absolute majority of the retirement board that is five out of nine -- for many, many years. Up until last year, nobody could remember anybody from the OFT being on it, not in living memory. Or any unaffiliated teacher or anything else, they had all the teacher seats. On their watch, the retirement system both hit a financial crisis, which was mostly triggered by the stock market crash a few years ago, but also hit a crisis in its health care fund, the health care side of the ledger, which was also largely triggered by the stock market crash, but also by lack of foresight, and lack of good management, and oversight and anticipating this fund was going to run out because of health care cost trends, combined with falling investment earnings. But more to the point, it also blew up in scandal over excessive and extravagant spending on staff benefits that were way out of line with what teachers enjoy, on board member travel, on perks given to board members by companies that did business with the retirement system, and all of that has played itself out in significant changes in the composition of the board, and in indictments on ethics violations charges. Now, every board member that was on that board around 2002,

2003 -- including every OEA member that was on the board, including one incumbent that's still on the board now -- every one of them, it was a few -- the executive director and a couple of other staff. So there's been a lot of tensions around that. Those tensions actually go back to Merrick's time, trying to get us a seat on the board. We now have two seats on the board, but we won them the hard way in a contested election after the scandals broke, and they lost some of their credibility.

We also had tensions up and down, around the fight against privatization, where they've been perceived to be more passive, and we've had to take the lead, they want to be at the table, they joined our -- the good news was they decided to join our coalition, join our lawsuit after initially filing a separate one, but the bad news is, as part of the coalition, they tend to slow things down enormously, want a big voice in the decisions, and want to contribute chump change to either the public relations side of it as well as the legal side of it. So that's been very frustrating, and they will probably complain about me running with the ball out, consulting everybody every minute. I think they have no concept of how to run a public relations campaign, couldn't do one if their lives depended on it. So there's been tensions around that. So we're at a low ebb in terms of my presidency, we're at a low point. In fact, we're going to have another round of AFT, NEA mediation next month. So that was just kind of that strand.

Back to the major track here which was just kind of, what have we done with the OFT since 2000? So we've added a professional issues director, a full-time legislative and political action director.

We then added just two years ago a communications director, which was really one of my top priorities coming in the door, because I understand from the way I worked at the local, that you can't influence public policy with out influencing public opinion. Well, the other alternatives, you have to have really big checks you can hand in the back room to politicians, and we haven't got checks that big. We finally persuaded them again to just have one person for both public relations, media relations, and internal communications. So she has to do it all, and she does it very well. Most recently, we took the AFT up on its offer of the Saybo position, which was the best deal they've ever offered us, in terms of helping to support a state level position on an ongoing basis. So we've expanded staff, still in the four field coordination; we're now going through an internal discussion about whether we should reduce that to three, because we have expanded these other areas. Or, whether the alternative is to really change the role of field coordinator, so that they're engaging with locals, not just on when it's negotiations time, or when there's a significant grievance or arbitration, but engaging on a continuing basis, getting them activated on legislative and political stuff, getting them involved in more training programs, getting them to participate more in OFT, both governance and programs and campaigns. And that's an internal taskforce actually looking at staffing services and local participation in OFT, and it's going to come to a head prior to our next convention in March. So it has to report before that.

We've won people over; some of them were skeptical, on expanding the capacity of State Fed in a lot of areas. I feel like we've made a ton of progress. I feel really good about

where we've been, where we've gotten to. But we still have some debates that are healthy debates, really. I think we're going to come out stronger, whatever we do, because the discussion has been very deep and just be worried about what are the impediments to getting more locals to participate, how do we get more engagements? And so I think the field coordinators are quickly coming to realize that It's either A or B. They've either got to look at the job differently, or expect to have a larger case than the locals, and still have the expectation that they're going to have to work a different way, in a more continuous engagement type of way.

The other thing we've done is create, with the AFT's impetus, we created the state level Solidarity Fund, but not just to receive the rebates from the national level deposited. The last two conventions we had not only a cost of living increase in dues, and a little bit to help phase in these various staff positions or phase in our share of it, but we've also, in two increments, set aside some of our state capita for our own Solidarity Fund. So the Solidarity Fund at the state level is now getting not only the rebates for AFT, but also a direct contribution from state per caps. That's going to build up and be a very valuable resource in the future.

We've either participated actively or helped to actually initiate a number of coalitions here in Columbus around legislative and policy issues that we found is critical, that's not new, but we just probably do more of them than we've ever done, to try expand our influence, but also to ultimately have more influence on public policy, legislation.

Q: Did OFT have an influence in Columbus?

A: Yes, you know, even before, I could say this -- again, to compliment to my predecessor, is that for our size, and given he would certainly be down here a lot during legislative sessions, which are pretty much endlessly; they don't ever really go away unless they want to. There's no legal limit on the life or frequency of the sessions. Given a part-time lobbyist and just the president spending part of his time in having to travel from Cleveland to do it, we had influence and visibility beyond our size. But not near enough, not near as much, I think, as we do now. The main reason was that we had good leadership; we had very articulate leadership. But the underlying reason was our policies. We simply had better, more sensible policies on educational issues that were more responsive to public opinion; more responsive to contemporary needs in education. Legislators and other policy-makers recognize that. But, on the other hand, as I found out, the legislators had no clue who we were. Or thought we only represented Cleveland, or a couple cities. Maybe they knew we represented Toledo, or maybe even Cincinnati, but they had no clue we had locals in other parts of the state, because we hadn't activated those locals to communicate with legislators at that point. So we had a good foundation to build on, but we really have expanded that visibility a lot.

I'm trying to think if I missed anything major. The thing that I guess I'm most concerned about at this point, other than the ongoing battles over big public policy issues like privatization and school funding. Internally, I guess the two biggest challenges we still face is again, how to engage more locals more of the time in the big fights that we're in, and secondly is organizing.

It's a real challenge to really create that capacity kind of from scratch, and it's been slower going than I'd like. I'm trying to do two tracks: one is to look where there is not necessarily easy pickings, but the possibility for short-term growth, even if it's, you know, in small increments. And that's, for example, looking at all of the districts where we represent teachers, and see what the status of the PSRPs are. And we find out that quite a few of them, you're talking about 20 people, 50 people, whatever -- that are not represented or that are some kind of little independent group that has some kind of a quasi-contract, but not a real union. So we're working that.

Q: What about Higher-Ed?

A: Higher-Ed has been the main focus. Even that, you can divide into the smaller opportunities, like community college -- there's about six community colleges still unorganized, mostly in not close to any of our locals, they tend to be out in the hinterlands, the ones that aren't organized, with some exceptions. But even those, if you were to get all six of them, and represent the full-time faculty, you wouldn't end up with very many members. The part-time faculty, of course, is growing enormously, and they're not covered by the bargaining law. So I would include the full-time community college faculty in the notion of short-term, incremental growth, where we have a chance to do something solid in short-to-medium-term.

The big topic, really, became clear as we analyzed the potential for growth in our industry, large education, that Higher-Ed is the biggest opportunity for growth, and that the big targets are either the four-year universities that aren't organized, and/or the adjunct faculty in the graduate assistants. We estimate, nobody's got really good

numbers, but there's at least 25,000 adjunct faculty and graduate assistants in just the public colleges and universities, at least. And right now, nobody else is trying to organize them. So again, it's been a tug-of-war, trying to get both our people to make that commitment and stay with it, and they've been great, they've given us a lot of latitude, knowing that it's a long-term process.

The other tug-of-war is with AFT to try to get them to devote significant resources to do these large-scale campaigns, knowing that we don't have coverage under the law, knowing that it's going to be a long haul, and take a lot of political mobilization, a lot of community campaigns and stuff. But having said that, they've been pretty supportive; we had a strong campaign at the University of Cincinnati, both to affiliate the AAUP chapter, and also to organize the adjuncts. There were some significant gaps in the staffing of those campaigns, and we came that close, maybe some tactical errors or strategic errors even. We came like eight votes short of getting a two-thirds vote of the full-time faculty part. It was tragic. Shouldn't have gotten trapped into that two-thirds requirement, and somehow we did. That was really sort of internal sabotage by folks, by the technocrats within the AAUP chapter that the old guard didn't want it to happen. So the majority's will, and in fact the 63% will was thwarted. Adjuncts was a viable campaign, and it was allowed to fade, as the AFT somewhat lost interest once the full-time faculty weren't going to be part of the deal. But that's one we certainly hope to revive at some point.

In the meantime, we have a strong campaign, certainly a very challenging one, at Ohio State for about 4,500 graduate assistants. It looks like we're going to probably try to carve out the teaching assistants first, more like maybe 2,700. Certainly still a big

challenge. There are also lecturers and post-docs on that campus that we want to look at next. Also, another possible short-term target or medium-term target, adjunct faculty at Owens Community College in Toledo, one of the fastest-growing in the state, where we already represent everybody else. Faculty, all the PSRPs, I don't know if you call them that at the college level, but everybody from clerical to maintenance to custodian, and even the security force, which is a separate unit. That's fun because when the faculty was having trouble getting the contract, we went up there for a rally with labor people from the city and stuff, and then we took the rally and marched it right into the administration building, and right into the president's office, and the security folks were called, of course, to make us leave (laughter) -- "We're proud to be thrown out by the OFT members here to do their job, we respect that." That was kind of fun.

There's a good example; we're talking about even with a couple of accretions, to get virtually every non-administration professional in the college has now been accreted to the faculty units. We may be talking about 170 people, and there are somewhere between 900 and 1,000 adjuncts. But there's where the AFT feels a little bit more comfortable taking a shot, because they got a full-time faculty local as sort of a base.

My goal is to really do a state-wide campaign, where we would plant the flag, we would organize maybe even an associate membership program to plant the flag on as many campuses as we can, to mobilize support to change the law, to reach out to sympathetic full-time faculty, students, whoever, and get them engaged in that effort. And so also,

we've got boots on the ground, so to speak, in a lot of campuses, when we eventually do get the law changed, and are in a better position to fend off the UAW and whoever else then decides to try to come in. So I'm still hoping to sell that, now that there's a little more money in the organizing till.

AFT's been also kind of waiting to see some change in the political alignment here, and that, we hope, is about to come to pass. The governor can't decree it, but his support, and Democratic gains on the legislature could help put us in reach of getting some change there.

So generally speaking, Higher-Ed is our focus, clean up so to speak in the K-12 levels, we had some independent teacher locals that we're continuing to work on affiliating. The other place I had really hoped to go when I first was elected and began to think about an organizing strategy was early childhood, and to be honest, AFT has slept while AFSCME, SEIU gobble it up. I've been yelling about that ever since the organizing committee was created however many years ago that was now, must be three, four years. They finally are seeming to focus on it, but honest to God, they really allowed competitors to grab very strategic hilltops, like the larger head start units. I know this in great detail because my wife is the one doing it for SEIU, that woke up AFSCME, they've got now quite a few. So we're not writing it off. But at least we do now, 'cause when I was first elected, you didn't have the tools, the resources that you need to come in and say, we can represent you well. That was readily available in higher. Higher-Ed departments got great stuff. We got the policy stuff, we got the organizing stuff. We got

conferences to send people to. We didn't have any of that in early childhood. Now the infrastructure is kind of there, at least to an adequate degree. But again, others have gotten a big head start.

Q: Is this one reason they brought in the early child care work force group?

A: Yeah, that was the first, sort of, yeah. But it's been very slow. I never have understood why. So that's a little bit of wandering, I guess that's kind of what we've been doing at OFT. What I was just working on when you got here is starting to think about the next stage of leadership transition, as well as just increasing our effectiveness of our state representation.

Now, we're creating as an extension of our ULI, we also actually created an OFT ULI, that didn't exist before, to complement the AFT ULI stuff, and get people who aren't going to make their way to Wisconsin for the Great Lakes or to Washington for the various conferences. It's gotten off to a really good start. We've had now three summer institutes, as well as we'll do two or three Saturday programs during the year. We also have a local leaders' conference at the end of September; we've expanded that to some training as well as current issues.

As part of that, as the extension of that, we're creating a state leaders' seminar. It's by invitation, which we're looking for people who have shown leadership potential and are interested in playing more of a leadership role at the state level, or maybe already representing OFT on some state level committees. So we're looking to strengthen our ability to put people to nominate people for various state level committees of the right academic standards and review test items to curriculum frameworks that the state

develops for local use. Commissions task forces that the governor appoints or that the legislature creates, chairing OFT's standing committees, chairing convention committees or future OFT officers, the whole gamut basically. But one of the premises is you send people on these committees; they may be very able, they may be very smart, they may know their field very well, but if they don't know what the hell's going on, they don't say much. It takes an extraordinarily assertive individual to walk in there and start being assertive. It helps at least a lot to know who else is representing on this task force. Who are these others people? Where do they come from? What are their organizations' take on this issue? What's really the subtext? What's really going on in this debate, beyond the formal what's on paper? So that context is really crucial for any kind of representation at all. So I'm real excited about that; we're just about to send the invitations out within the next day or two. Again, hoping to plant some seeds for future leaders while I'm still around.

Q: That's excellent. That's something that most states really need.

A: Honestly, I was inspired by some really good leadership development work with some of our locals, even some of our smaller locals, like our Oregon local is an incredible program. Cleveland Heights, although it isn't as formal as a course, they seem to do very well at recruiting and bringing new leaders up through the chain. Cincinnati president, although again not as maybe a formal process, has done very well at identifying, in the last couple years, younger folks, and also pays a lot of attention to diversity in recruiting leadership and staff. So it just was clearly time for OFT to take a page from all those efforts.

Q: Excellent.

A: Great OFT office staff too. I have to say, I have to brag a little bit -- I never had the chance to actually just hire -- in the local, even when we had staff, there's a lot of politics to it. There's a lot of who's in line, who's worked their way up. This is the first time I got a chance to hire staff by actually advertising, screening, interviewing and of course, we had internal applicants, but also external. I've actually turned out to be halfway good at it. (laughter) People seem to be real pleased, and I'm very pleased with who we've hired. Because you can make a mistake, and you only have one person in legislation and one person in communications and one person in organizing it's like, that can kind of blow your whole program, if you hire the wrong person.

Q: Do you want to move into TURN?

A: Sure. Yeah.

Q: Why don't we just start from the beginning? How did TURN formalize?

A: Well, that involves a little AFT politics, but there's no way to make a truthful account of it without -- you probably have heard some of this, without going into that. It was really born out of the ashes of an AFT initiative, which I think was called Leadership for School Reform. It goes back to the time period when Al was really emerging as a champion of school reform. You know, late '80s, into the '90s. It's when Genie Kemble was running the ed issues department; Adam Urbanski was chairing the closest thing we had to an ed reform component of our governance structures, it was actually called Education Research Committee of the executive council. But it became the vehicle for discussing educational policy, not just research. So basically the AFT headquarters created this thing, inviting folks from various locals that seemed interested in educational reform. A lot of them came out of the ER&D network that was at that time sort of emerging, as well

as some locals that they didn't have the ER&D, they were doing other interesting reform initiatives. Adam was there sort of presiding, and being involved in his role as the chair of the relevant committee. I don't know, had a series of meetings, it gets a little dim in terms of what we actually did. We had speakers, we had programs. So this is actually a pretty interesting story; it'd be interesting to get other people's take on it.

Q: Well, you're the first one to talk about TURN.

A: Really? Well, Adam would certainly have a lot to say about this. But so other people were closely involved, Louise Sundin, for example. So anyhow, long story short, there was, I thought, healthy, vigorous discussion and debate during these sessions. But there was a tension between the fact that typically, the people that were involved in the professional side of union activity, which was kind of a newly-emerging strand, at that time. People who were involved in ER & D tended to be and I'm using the term in a very sort of historical context, tended to be, I would say, just sort of political and cultural liberals in a fairly mainstream sense, but also coming out of the baby boomer era influenced by various radical and protest movements of the '60s and '70s. I think union activists in general, that tends to be the case. So they had a certain take, a certain bias on cultural issues that were sort of hot button issues at the time. Where AFT's take tended to be in a very particular niche, the folks out in the hinterlands didn't necessarily even know or recognize. I'm talking about the certain amount of cultural traditionalism or cultural conservatism, you might even say, that was a part of Shanker's vision of education and educational reform. So what were the hot button issues at that time? And this is pretty much all dissipated by now, but: bilingual education, multicultural education, which is a

very loose term, but a hot button issue at the time. So the educational issues department was going to try to stick pretty close to the AFT line.

The incident that really kind of sticks in my mind is when Genie brought in E.D. Hirsch to speak to the group. I had been one of the people in the audience that was kind of bristling at listening to E.D. Hirsch, because I had him in the same camp in my mind with Bill Bennett and his book of virtue that came later. But Hirsch's core curriculum was seen as and criticized a lot as being very sort of Eurocentric and traditional Western Civ kind of approach. I have a lot of respect for him, by the way, and I think my perception, it's not that I've followed this in great detail, but my general perception about him is that he was pretty stunned by those criticisms, included the flak he got from our group. And that he has adapted his stuff pretty quickly to take some of those concerns into account. Bill Bennett, of course was selling, he was being a politician. Hirsch was actually trying to be an educator, and trying to create something useful educationally. So Bennett hasn't budged, so we found out he has traditional values that are not so high-falootin'. There were other incidents like this, or other instances of that --

Q: Well, American educators carrying a lot from Ravitch about. And Hirsch, and basically that whole -- what was it called? Teacher core network, teacher network. Right, go ahead, I'm sorry.

A: And even on AFT, like gay rights and some other -- there was some cultural tangents that were an outgrowth of a certain political philosophy. There was a clash between that very sort of specific ideology, that again most AFT activists out in the field wouldn't even have been able to necessarily describe or identify or know what it was, but all they knew

was that on some of these issues that came up in the course of our deliberation, and some of the speakers we had, they didn't like and they didn't agree. There was this tension, and they'd come push back; they weren't just behaving like sheep and going along with the party line. Somebody got uncomfortable with that. It was may have been Genie, in terms of then what she recommended; it may have been Al, based on reports he was giving back. That I'm only guessing from the outside, because I was a participant but not really in some of the AFT hierarchy at that time. So we got dissolved, this institute got, you ought to get Adam's side of the story, something like this; he would know first-hand. But at some point he was called in and told it was over. And didn't get what he felt, and I know this from talking to him, was a good explanation nor did the rest of us. So, gee. AFT is the mother of autonomous locals. It has encouraged independent, autonomous, self-activated locals and local creativity and initiative, et cetera. Especially those locals who were taking Al's missives to heart about, trying to play a leadership role in school reform, increasing what we found that we needed to network. Because a lot of the action, moreso even than now, was local, initiating around professional development, peer review, career ladders, restructuring schools, trying new approaches to reaching disadvantaged kids, or dropouts, or discipline schools for hard cases in discipline, all sorts of things that we were trying to do. We just needed the network. So literally, TURN was created in a sense out of the ashes of this AFT-led initiative, and just created an autonomous, sort of self-governed but loose sort of network. I was involved in those early discussions; Diana Porter from my local was very involved in them. But it ended up being Adam, and Helen Bernstein from LA, UTLA, that actually convened the first meeting, and it was deliberately by design across organizational lines. And that time, it

was hard to find NEA locals, but we wanted to recognize those few NEA locals that were trying to do some educational reform, and create something that over time might encourage more NEA affiliates to take up that approach.

Q: What was their first initial reaction?

A: The NEA?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, and as you probably know, there were then some tensions -- I wouldn't say rising to the level of conflict, but tensions, let's just say, about what is within AFT about, what is this saying, and how independent is it? Is Adam going to use it for a political vehicle? Et cetera. NEA has so many networks, so many caucuses, so many substructures, I don't think they ever blinked. It just is a very different political structure; it just didn't create any big concern. They at least were nominally supportive of it. And mainly the staff -- there were always staff within NEA who were more educationally progressive than the policies of the organization would reflect. And so certainly within the staff, there were people who encouraged it. And it's not the AFT

End of Audiofile #5

Tom Mooney Interview Part 6

A: -- weren't trying to squash it or anything. But there were just -- there was some uncomfortableness, maybe just even on the staff level, seeing it as sort of competition or another place where educational initiatives were coming from; whereas AFT wanted to see itself as the leader of education reform, and largely has been at the national level. So I never thought there was an issue. For one thing, you had a whole bunch of AFT vice

presidents that were part of it. And I know, Ed, for example, is like, "These are my guys!" You know, that's his attitude. "Why should I be worried about them?" (laughter) "I don't get it." You know?

Q: Right.

A: Sandy had a little bit of uncomfortableness, at times. It seemed to come and go or ebb and flow. I think some of the -- probably the staff being in her ear, maybe some presidents of really large locals, by which I don't mean New York.

Q: (laughs)

A: New York was part of it, but some other very large locals that maybe found some of these ideas and initiatives uncomfortable, didn't want reporters calling them us saying, "Well, you know, Minneapolis is doing X. Have you guys ever considered doing X?" and they haven't a desire to do X, you know, peer review, let's say. So I think there's a little bit of that, little bit of staff. Never was a terribly big deal. Never bothered or worried me, frankly.

Q: Right.

A: But it was there. So I only bring that up only because it has to do with the origin -- your question, what was the origin of TURN? And that was it. But it's been very successful! I mean, as a local president trying to deliver the bread and butter; be an effective bargaining agent in all the traditional ways, what you have to do, you absolutely have to do if you're going to lead people in a reform direction and take them out on a little bit of a limb with you and try some experimental things, to do all of that. You needed a support group, a network to bounce things off of. Everybody stole everybody's ideas. But you know what else? It was like therapy. It really was. It was like you'd go through periods

of labor-management and after you take the initiative -- In our case, it was not born out of labor-management cooperation at all.

By the way, this was another place where the AFT was a little off. They developed a theory, trying to figure out why these things were breaking out in certain places and how to maybe get it to expand. But their theory was it emerges where there is a mature collective bargaining local. That much I tend to agree with. Although not always. And there is a high degree of labor-management cooperation. Some places but definitely not my local. And in a sense I think that was a bad descriptor. It was a bad diagnosis -- or not diagnosis but, yeah, a bad descriptor to put on this initiative because it gave everybody who didn't have good labor-management relations an excuse not to even put their toe in the water and try to become an education leader. We had to get there the hard way. We had a school board administration who didn't want to bargain with us at all! If they had to do it, they certainly were going to try to confine it to wages, benefits, and hours, and very limited working conditions. So we had to fight our way to the table again. After having fought our way to the table in the first place, we had to fight our way to the table again, to get educational issues to be part of the conversation, as we did it by going to the public with our ideas when management wasn't receptive, and sort of leveraging them into taking these ideas more seriously. I think a lot of locals could do that even. Eventually what that does, if you don't have a cooperative or enlightened management, you're much more likely to get one if you spend a few years banging away and leading on these issues. Eventually you're more likely, at least, to get some people on the boards or in the community saying, "Hey, why don't we get a superintendent who

will work with them? These people have some pretty good ideas. They seem to really want to help improve things. Why don't we get somebody that'll work with them?" You know? Or "We've got a superintendent turning over. Why don't we look for somebody that might actually work with them on this stuff?" That's what happened to us. And not forever because superintendents come and go, but that was a phase that was really important. Then a new board comes in, or new board members, they decide, "You've got too much power. Unions running the district? They've got too much to say. The contract's getting too thick. There's all these other things in it besides the traditional things. And the superintendent doesn't have any freedom of action." So then they bring in this guy whose job it is, supposedly, to break us, drive us out of the temple, and all that stuff. And then we had war again. Well, one of the things that was really valuable to me about TURN is. You know, I'm Irish enough to get drawn into the fight -- maybe a little too readily. So we'd be beating up each other. And you'd go to TURN, and you go, "Oh! I almost forgot. We were supposed to be (laughs) helping the kids. We were supposed to be like changing education to help the kids." It really was, seriously, a place to refocus, several times a year, and reflect with people who are, somewhat like minds, really, very valuable. That's really all it was designed to do. It was never designed to be an organization. It doesn't have any officers. It doesn't have any policies. Doesn't pass resolutions. It's just a network. And we've been pretty religious about, keeping it as such. So that's my story. Then one of the things I'm involved in now and real excited about is not really formally a part of TURN, but it definitely is something that grew out of TURN, which is this Institute for Teacher Union Leadership.

Q: Oh Yeah.

A: Both AFT and NEA--

Q: What is the difference there?

A: The difference is that… it's not a difference philosophically. It's difference in sort of mission or function. What we're trying to do with ITUL is…there were actually false starts at creating something like this out of TURN, or even around TURN. So finally we got one started. Let's hope we can sustain it. The idea is to expand the number of locals where educational change, reform, improvement, just plain results is a central focus of the union's work and thinking, and to help not only expand the number but also hopefully increase the effectiveness of local leaders that are trying to do that. By creating an intensive development, training program, where we learn from each other, but we also learn from outside experts, so to speak, and we get context. We get a big picture context for this work. We're creating this as we go and feeling our way.

We're just kind of wrapping up our first cohort of nine locals. Very interesting is that the nine locals we invited, we being just sort of an ad hoc organizing committee, again, that kind of came out of discussions in and around TURN meetings. We invited nine locals. All nine locals said yes. We were able to get, again, a little support from AFT, some from NEA, and modest grants from a handful of foundations -- that we now are up to a point where we've got to try to renew and hopefully increase. No staff, all volunteer leadership. We've put on two, week-long summer institutes for this cohort. It's a five-member team from each of nine locals. Several follow-up meetings during the school year. And a site visitation, a sort of mentoring process is a key part of it, parallel component of it. So we're starting to think about a second cohort. We've got to get

grants that we needed. We needed to have at least somebody paid, part-time at least, to coordinate and keep it moving. Just with volunteers working on the phone, working on e-mail, things just kind of stop and start too much.

But I'm real excited about it. I think it's really important for the long-term. There were two reasons why we thought it was very timely. But I guess one was the underlying reason was why hasn't this kind of thinking grown expanded to more and more locals? My theory is that a lot of the local leaders, when they hear about this kind of work, they hear about TURN -- TURN kind of becomes the symbol or the representation of this type of thinking, although certainly, by no means -- There are plenty of locals that aren't in TURN for one reason or another, that are doing really good educational work. Not like we think we have a monopoly on it. But there are a lot of locals who tend to think, you'll hear them say to stuff like, "Well, Yeah, we don't do that sort of stuff. We don't do that thing." Or, "We don't do that." And they really tend to think of traditional bargaining and bargaining issues versus this other stuff. I think they also believe that those of who have been engaged in it do it out of some just idealism. Or they also think that people who do that kind of stuff are likely to get voted out of office. I think there's been some serious misinterpretation of some local elections over the last few years, in my opinion. I think it's at least as dangerous to not take up educational issues and to basically sit there and let everybody do it to your members. Whether it's the superintendent, the governor, the school board, the outside experts, the consultants, or, Secretary Spellings determining the educational agenda. I think your members eventually get real tired of you saying, "It's not our fault. We didn't do it. We didn't have anything to do with it." The Pontius

Pilate approach to educational issues. I think that's what happened in Chicago. I'm talking about two elections ago, two regime changes ago.

Q: Right.

A: Yes, they suddenly found themselves cornered, where they had to engage in something called reform, but it was very -- it was only sort of last-minute. In fact, by that time they were under so much pressure that they did, in fact, agree to some stuff that I would have never have agreed to, namely a school redesign plan where people can lose their jobs.

We negotiated a very bold school redesign plan. It was very controversial. Everybody was guaranteed not to lose their jobs. So in other words, there are lines you don't cross. But in that case I think they got -- it was just too many years of Pontius Pilate. You know, "We're not involved in that stuff. That's coming from somewhere else."

Well, maybe you should be. You know? Aren't you our representative? Aren't we teachers, and isn't this about teaching? I mean, I don't think that necessarily is politically viable, increasingly less viable, as there are all these external demands for change that are mounting. So our view is we have to try to figure out how to, one, help people deal with the educational issues constructively, deal with the external demands for change, and also deal with the demands from your younger members to represent them professionally and provide professional help to them, while also delivering the goods economically and getting reelected. That's our goal, is to try to in simple terms, is to try to help people figure out how to do that.

The other thing, part of it is letting them in on -- I guess I would call it our dirty little secret, which is: Guess what? We're not just doing this out of idealism. This gets us more power. You know, hello? I guess it's our fault we haven't…. We've been up there making all these presentations and conferences and workshops for years, talking about all these educational things we've done. And they tend to get presented as great innovations for their own sake, you know. Isn't this exciting and new and different? I mean, it's not really that new and different any more, but, along the way in the 80's and 90's it was. But what we probably never explicit enough about is: You know what? At least in my town. This is how we got power. This is how we got the power to deliver raises every year. This is how we got agency shop and binding arbitration and grievances, which, yes, some of you had long ago but we still had to get in the 80's. We got that by developing leverage and power by standing for the right stuff educationally. That's how we got community support to keep the board from going after us, at least for many years. That's how we got the business community backed off, at least, if not, supportive at times. It wasn't by just sitting at the table and pounding on the table or threatening to strike if you don't give us what we want. That wasn't working any more. You know? It won't work because teachers never really like to strike. It's really hard to get them on strike! (laughs) In my town they had to believe it was instead of feeling like it's unprofessional because everybody's going to tell on them at the cocktail parties or in the letters from the superintendent, they had to believe that, in fact, under these conditions and for these demands, it's the only professional thing to do.

Q: Right.

A: That's how we got power. You know? So we're trying to -- one of my goals in this program is to -- we've got to share that secret so that maybe more folks will figure out that's not near as risky to lead as it is to sit on your hands and let other people inflict upon your members all these stupid reforms and negative approaches.

Then the other thing that made it timely, I think makes it timely is that in the non-bargaining states there is not this, sort of, rigid, doctrinaire approach to what is or isn't the union's role, what is or isn't a bargaining issue. Where are the lines drawn, where that's somebody else's concern. A: because they're looking for any issue they can engage in that their members care about. Right? Because they're trying to organize. Increasingly, what the members care about is the stuff everybody's throwing at them, the new standards, the new tests, the new certification rules, the whatever whatever, the restructuring, the charter schools. It's what happening. So instinctively good union leaders who are good organizers are going to take up those issues. And again, the generational change, the younger teachers, they don't have any hidebound ideas of what a union is or isn't supposed to deal with. It just seems natural that, if there's a problem that affects me professionally or affects us as teachers, collectively, in the school system, that, yeah, if we're going to support an organization, let them deal with it. So part of a theory of operation here is, or theory of action, is to get folks from also new, emerging locals and try to help them figure out how to deal with these issues, but also how to tie in the economic gains for your members and stuff.

Q: Wow!

A: So it's real exciting and something I hope to continue. When I eventually retire it's something I want to keep doing, as some kind of legacy.

Q: Well, that's something that's actually going to completely change bargaining over for teachers' unions.

A: It should. Yeah. If we don't, I think we're really going to lose the, sort of, cohesion, the loyalty, the support of younger members.

Q: This was something I think you said, or I think I read it somewhere else, where AFT started this craft union, moved the industrial unionism. Is this the new way of -- future for AFT and NEA?

A: Yeah, we hope. I think that's exactly right. Actually, we started as a craft union, but the formative period of collective bargaining, of teachers getting collective bargaining: 60's and 70's, alongside other public employees, municipal employees and stuff, that were, beginning to get bargaining. We copied, pretty much lock, stock, and barrel, from the wave of unionization that preceded our wave, which was industrial unionism. And much of what we borrowed has stood us in very good stead, I mean, the collective power, the militancy the power of the bargaining process itself. We were dealing with single employers, whereas craft unions dealt with multiple employers and had different kinds of structures for negotiating contracts, delivering benefits. So there was a lot to be borrowed. But we kind of borrowed everything. (laughs) And not everything served us in good stead. Or it maybe did for a while, and, we needed to enter a new phase. So I think our view is let's borrow from everywhere that we can. Let's go back and borrow some things the craft unions have traditionally done. Peer review's an obvious thing. You know, when I got pushed back… I never had a lot. Frankly, I think some people

who think peer review's all that controversial, and their members maybe haven't tested the waters. But got some. Of course, inevitably, somebody's going to stand up at the meeting and say, "This is antiunion! You can't have a member violating another union member. That's antiunion." I said, "Oh, is it? Ooh, wow! Would you --? Somebody needs to go down the hall here and tell the carpenters and, over there, asbestos workers on the second floor, the electrical workers up on the third floor that they're antiunion practices. That their local's been engaged in for about 200 years, and they'd better stop." (laughter) And actually, I didn't -- that's not an original me. Dal Lawrence was the one who made that light bulb go off in my head. Because he started using that analogy, when they first began to take their thing on the road

Q: Yeah, but it's still true.

A: It's very true. Yeah. But the other thing is we should borrow from other professions, where, there aren't unions -- but are from the components that make them a profession. Because our members aspire to be professionals! You know? And so why wouldn't we? The other thing that I think is really important, and Al certainly helped me and others with this, is take off our blinders and look at other countries.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, we are so, not just in our union structure but in our whole education reform discussion. God, we have got such consistent blinders on! It's like even though the contemporary education reform movement was largely fueled initially and still fueled by international comparisons of student achievement, we have tended to look for any other possible conceivable way to get to the results those other countries get, except to do what they do to get them. I mean, literally we spent ten years, after "Nation At Risk," with

random innovations -- I'm sure I'm almost directly quoting Al on this -- that had no relationship to what, it was that other countries were doing to get better results. Finally, we copied one big idea from the rest of the world, which is having standards. And Al, obviously, and AFT were a huge part of moving that along. But now we have Americanized it in some very unproductive ways. We are over-testing kids, which, they don't do nearly this degree. We've corporatized it. We want to measure the productivity every ten minutes. And unfortunately now, our version of it, some elements of our version of a standards-based system are now being exported back to the rest of the world. And there are unions over there having to fight this over-testing and accountability mechanisms that aren't very professional. But what we still haven't done is looked at, and I'm talking about the union but also the whole education reform debate in America, pretty much still doesn't look at structurally how they organize schools and schooling to get the results they get in other countries. And so, from the union's standpoint, we really need to look at the fact that in most countries the structure of education, obviously, is, integrally tied up with the tied to the structure of the union. In most countries, the principal is still the principal teacher! They still teach. So naturally, they're in the union. So that labor-management polarization that we saw in our own, which was one reason why we copied the industrial unions because we were feeling alienated and polarized, and that's, what gave rise to the, sort of, militant industrial union movement, isn't there in these other countries. Now in some countries the principal doesn't teach, but they're still in the union. Like Australia. I have a primitive theory about that, which is that, even though they don't teach, what they don't have is the Melbourne Board of Education and superintendent, with this huge bureaucracy that the principal has to both fear and maybe

aspire to climb into -- and suck up to -- and most of the time that means beating up on the teachers to prove that they're worthy of being part of the administrative team. There's no such entity, like there isn't in almost every other country. It's a state system. But there's a state ministry of education, and they might have some curriculum people and occasionally inspector and a professional or occasionally a professional development workshop. But basically, day in and day out, it's us and here right at the school, got to figure out how to get this job done. The principal and teachers generally don't find themselves in warring camps. So them being in the union isn't strange. So, I mean, the point is not that -- I'm not saying this model or that model is the best. I'm just saying we've got to take off our blinders and borrow freely from wherever we can to meet our contemporary needs and our members' aspirations. And, yeah, you know, Al helped internationalize the conversation. I really think we need to refresh or renew that effort, to look, both as a union and a broader educational enterprise, this country, to like look around and quit pretending this is the only possible way to organize schools.

In fact, Adam is talking about, been talking with us and with Ed about an international TURN, in a sense, as he's kind of phasing himself out of leadership of the domestic TURN. And I think that's a real exciting idea.

Q: That's a page right out of Andy Stern.

A: In terms of --? Well, yeah.

Q: And sort of an international unionism

A: Focus on organizing internationally.

Q: But he's talking to his equivalents over in England and Germany and creating --

A: That's what my wife does for him.

Q: She does the international?

A: Well, she's the lead staff person on the global organizing partnerships.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh! So she's always over in New York and England?

A: Brazil, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Geneva, Paris, name it.

Q: All over.

A: Chile, Argentina, she's only had this job for not even two years.

Q: Wow!

A: She's got staff all over the world.

Q: Yeah.

A: (laughs) Yeah! I mean, it's all still very experimental, but it's exciting. Obviously it's something the industrial unions should have been doing 15, 20 years ago.

Q: I think we're about done. Is there anything that we didn't cover, you want to talk about or --?

A: I'm sort of dim on what did cover but --I think we covered pretty much most of the local -- and my local career. Nah, I think I want to see the transcript and see any glaring omissions.

End of Audiofile #6

End of Tom Mooney Interview