**Herb Magidson**

Q: This is Dan Golodner from the Walter P. Reuther Library AFT Archivists of AFT Oral History Project. We're talking with Herb Magidson, December 7, 2006 in Annapolis, Maryland. Thanks a lot for participating in this, Herb, we appreciate this.

A: Glad you're doing it.

Q: I'm glad I'm doing it, too. Why don't we just get started with where you were born and raised and a bit about your family.

A: Herb Magidson born on May 11, 1932. Born in New York City, but my folks had a candy store in Huntington on Long Island. I grew up helping my dad in the store. I had an older brother, five years older. I remember my dad worked from 5:00 am until 11:00 pm, seven days a week in the candy store. I remember running with dinner from the house we rented, about eight blocks away, to bring him dinner -- running because that was the only way it kept it warm. So, that's my roots. My roots were not in unions, although after I was active in the union I found out that my grandfather, Jacob Magidson, was a charter member of the Workman's Circle.

Q: Oh, interesting.

A: When I became the President of Jewish Labor Committee, a fellow who was the secretary at the time -- or the treasurer said, “Magidson, that rings a bell.” -- and he did a little work for me. He said your grandfather Jacob is in the original plot, so there was a labor background that I wasn't even aware of at the time.

Q: Your family wasn't part of the Circle at all?

A: No, not really. They might, you know? My mother -- they were Russian Jews. My mother came over in 1903 [Ciluvich] changed to [Castelowitz] changed to [Castle], you know? My dad Magied the son of a wandering preacher, they were white Russians.

I remember my dad loving his work in the candy store. He used to sit in the back and he was the chess champion of Huntington and he would sit in the back play chess with customers. They would always try to beat him and the customers would come in and say, Dave, I need a pack of cigarettes, and he would say, take it and leave the money in the cash register. I'm playing chess here, I'm doing the important stuff.

Q: (laughter)

A: So, that was my childhood. I grew up and went to Adelphi on Long Island. I was interested in being an actor and I

ended up, for a number of years, even after we were married, as an entertainer working with a couple of other guys doing nightclubs, musical, comedy stuff.

Q: Really?

A: I did a lot of TV shows, Ed Sullivan and all those shows and all that. I started teaching in 1957 in New York City. I had a license and, as a speech in drama teacher in New York City at the time there were licenses called speech and drama as opposed to English. I had a wonderful time. I taught part-time while I was working nightclubs from 1957 until about 1960 and then -- from '57-62 -- I was teaching and working in the entertainment business, I was a, sort of, piano player.

Q: So you did a little bit of the acting, a little bit of music --

A: Yeah. Right. Then I went full-time as a teacher in 1962. And with years of service before that -- you accumulate them as a regular substitute --

Q: Yes.

A: There were only 20,000 regular substitutes.

Q: Where did you first teach? What school?

A: When I was teaching part-time I would teach at East New York Vocational High School and Eli Whitney Vocational High School -- a lot of vocational high schools. When I began

teaching as a regular, full-time, at Andrew Jackson High School and I taught there full-time until 1969, became active in the union in the early '60s. I don't know whether you'll be surprised, but you'll be interested to know that I began in the political opposition to Al Shanker.

Q: You were with --

A: High School Teacher's Association.

Q: OK.

A: Ben Hawkberg and all those guys. And the reason was -- I didn't know anything about what was going on in the union, -- but my friends and the high schools were always anti-whoever was in power. My friends said, gee, you know, Cogen and Shanker and those guys they're terrible people. And I was elected, I guess, in early '60s, to be a delegate to the Delegate Assembly of the UFT. I went and I would talk as I do and I would listen and after it wasn't long before I said, you know, I'm not really with these guys -- my friends--and those guys makes more sense (laughs).

Q: Was it because they didn’t talk about collective bargaining and dignity in the workplace?

A: Well, they were just kind of negative folks. They weren't building anything and Al was building something and he had an encompassing vision for what the union should be. I remember one day, after a delegate assembly, Al came up to

me and he said, “I've heard you speak now a number of times. I think you're in the wrong caucus. You should think of joining us.” (laughs) I thought about it for a while and I said, you know, I really do believe this guy. (laughter) --

Q: (laughter)

A: -- and I became active. Then when decentralization came, as a result of ocean hill -- I did go through the strikes of '64, '65, '67, 68 and those --

Q: Right.

A: When decentralization came I remember Al saying that if the city is going to decentralize the schools -- and we had gone so quickly from an indicator, from 2,200 members to 55,000 members, that we were in need of adjusting to have a service for members. So, one of the fascinating -- I assumed, not knowing really a lot about the labor movement, that what I experienced at the UFT and at NYSUT was representative of how unions conduct themselves, and that wasn't true. I didn't know it at the time, but what I mean by that was that the UFT, NYSUT, the AFT see themselves as a service union, a union that provides benefits to its members. It's funded from the bottom up rather than the top down, which is different than many, many unions. And I dare say that I'm not sure of this -- most unions probably.

The funding mechanism is very fascinating because at AFT and its affiliates the dues goes to the local, the local then sends the state its portion, and the national its portion. Now, places like NYSUT the dues for the local and state go to the state and the state sends it on, but the money comes from below. In many unions, in AFSCME, SEIU, the money goes directly to the national, the national apportions it. So, where's the power? Follow the money. The power is in the top. Also, you have trusteeships in most unions where if the national is unhappy with what an affiliate is doing they take them over. OK, you guys are out and we're going to put in other guys here. That's not the case. Any local can leave AFT any time they want and the money stays with them if they do so.

So, the very nature of the funding mechanism motivates a different way of looking at what the nature of your job is as a leader, whether it's a leader at the national level, the state level, or the local level. It's not surprising that AFT, NYSUT, UFT saw themselves as a service mechanism, that their primary function was to represent members and to take care of their needs. Now, it was over a period of years that those need agencies start to look at those needs in terms of negotiating benefits, but also professional

development, also the whole matter of what are we, as a union movement, what do we stand for? What is our mission? What is our vision and so on and so forth? But it all flows from a different way than many of the other unions.

Q: So, maybe that was an easier way to sell joining UFT as opposed to others with the teachers, who had never been part of a union movement before --

A: True.

Q: -- or understood that my dad and my mother were part of the unions so that I wouldn't have to be in the union, that's why I'm a teacher.

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that a great selling point, then? Did that help with the organization?

A: Sure, because teachers were not naturally disposed to join the union, but they were naturally disposed to wanting to solve problems that they had, and they had lots of problems.

Q: Like what?

A: Well, I mean, because the principal was the dictator. I remember when I first began teaching -- this will remain with me forever. I was working at a vocational high school, I think it was East New York, and Sidney Platt was the principal. Sidney called me in and he said -- because

I had a license in speech and dramatic arts -- he said, you will do the play this year and I said, that's terrific, because I really wanted to do it, it was fine. We talked a little bit about it and then I said to him, as we were finishing this conversation, I said, do I get paid? How much do I get paid for this? And he looked at me and he said, how unprofessional of you. (laughs) Exactly, like that. Like, you're thinking about money?

Teachers had 20 minutes to eat while you supervised the kids you were eating and you stood up while you were supervising kids and ate a sandwich. And you had absolutely no control. There was never a sense of being a professional, of teaching as a profession. You had no control over how you spent your time. The first day I ever taught in February of 1957, as a substitute teacher, and I had gone in and I was going to have this for three weeks or four weeks, or whatever it was, and Charlie Spiegler, who was a very nice guy, he was the chairman of the English Department, I was under him. Charlie said to me the first day, I want you to write a curriculum for the department. I was amazed. First of all, we didn't have one. Then, he asked this green kid who had never taught a day in his life. You know, somebody above him must have said to him,

I want a curriculum, and he said, well, let me take the guy who is lowest on the totem pole and do it. And you taught as many classes as you were told to teach. There was a rule that you taught five, but if you were asked to teach six, you taught six. There was no such thing as a class size maximum -- and you punched a clock.

Q: And also you had no prep time.

A: No. No, there were no prep times.

Q: No bathroom time.

A: No, you had classes, you had a 20-minute lunch, and you had supervision of study hall and so you would walk the halls and stuff like that.

Q: And any pre or after-school duties?

A: Whatever they wanted you to do.

Q: Shoveling snow to watching the traffic?

A: Whatever. So, teachers were not enamored of the concept of joining a union but they were enamored of having some control over their professional lives and not being just told this is what you do. I think that's what attracted teachers, the fact that things are so difficult for them and that they had no say in anything in what they taught or how they taught. When the idea of forming a union began to be talked about people got excited about it, partly because the argument that was used was very interesting and it has

to do with what's going on in the country now, with what unions are dealing with.

At the time -- the reason that we were able to organize and get collecting bargaining, one of the rationales was look at the number of people in the private sector who are in unions. At the time it was 35-40%, something like that, and millions of people in the union movement. The view of unions was, I think, different than it is today. They were not viewed as much as a special interest, but rather part of what a democratic process is. Now, people may have been against joining a union, but my recollection is that there wasn't such a negative sense of what a union stands for and what it is. So, we were able to say, look, if people in the private sector have the ability to organize, why shouldn't people in the public sector have the ability to organize?

What's fascinating is that we move over the last four decades to where about 7% of the private sector is organized and a much higher percentage of the public sector. For those in the public sector who look at the privates and say, well, they've got a problem, but the public sector has a problem because people are now starting

to say, hey, if only 7% in the private sector are organized, why the heck should we let the public sector organize? And so, the threat is, without question, there. It's a fascinating change.

At the time, I do remember that there were -- you've probably been told this before, there was something like 110 teacher organizations in the city. The elementary Catholic teachers, the junior high school Jewish teachers, you know, and so on and so forth, the history teachers -- there were 110 of them. And, Jansen was the superintendent and then Donovan was the superintendent, would sit down with each group and each group had about 10 minutes, and Donovan would say, I would love to give you that but that the whole social studies teachers -- if I give it to you, I got to -- so on and so forth. But the thing that, I think, was extremely helpful in the UFT winning collective bargaining, after Bob Wagner and the private sector unions in New York were so helpful, was that -- I'll tell you about a wonderful meeting that Al Shanker had with Jacob Potofsky, head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and David Dubinsky, head of the ILGWU, garment workers. And, of course, Walter Reuther, as I'm sure you know, helped to fund us in our drive for collective bargaining.

Q: Right.

A: Al came back from the meeting, I was not at the meeting -- Al came back from the meeting with Potofsky and Dubinsky and Dubinsky said to Al, "Al, what's the biggest problem you have?" Because the NEA wanted to organize teachers in New York City. And Al said, "Well, the biggest problem is there's a split. We can't get the high school teachers and the elementary school teachers together because the high school teachers feel that because they have Master's degrees that they should be paid more than the elementary school teachers. The elementary school teachers feel that they should get just as much as the high school teachers because what they're doing is just as important, so they hated each other. It was hard to get them together." Putofsky turns to Dubinsky and said it's like the cutters and the pressers.

Q: (laughter)

A: The cutters figured this is much more important and the guys who are pressing say that we should get at least what they make. You know, it was the same thing --

Q: Same argument.

A: -- same argument. Of course, what Al did, because he was so smart, what he did was he came up with a policy. If you have a Master's degree you'll get extra money, but you

don't have to be a high school teacher to get the extra money. If you're an elementary school teacher and you have a Master's degree you also get it. So, that satisfied the elementary teachers because they saw that they could get what the high school teachers -- and the high school teachers figured, hey, we're the guys who have the Master's degrees, they'll never get them, they were satisfied. That was one of the things that was very, very helpful in moving from a split where the high school teachers would say, well, we want our own organization -- you know, that was image. It was I'm better than you, you know? It's all of that.

Q: That's interesting, too, because now it's the basic standard that if you're in education, you have a Master's degree. So, the union actually helped move it even more to a professional level.

A: Absolutely. Also I remember the -- even after we got collective bargaining I -- because of my substitute teaching and then going to a full-time teacher I don't think my actual, regular license came to me until 1964. It happened to come to me and a number of other guys in my high school, and women, who were all going to get our license the first day of the strike of '64. I remember the discussion that went on. Well, if we go out, we're even

more vulnerable because, you've got to come in the first day of your regular license to get your regular license. Of course, we stood out, but I remembered the principal of Andrew Jackson High School, Dorothy Bonawit, who said anyone who doesn't commit -- you know, if you don't come in on Sunday, don't come in on Monday. Whoever doesn't come in, don't come in the next day because you will be out of a job. That caused a lot of people to think twice about it.

Q: Oh, absolutely.

A: The 2,200, or whatever it was, who stayed out at the first strike back in '61, or whatever it was --

Q: Sixty-one.

A: -- you know, years later 55,000 people remembered being out that day, which is, normal and natural.

Q: (laughter) Everybody went out in '61.

A: Hey, I was out. I was out.

Q: (laughter)

A: Andrew Jackson High School was in southeast Queens, Cambria Heights. It was a school that was built for about 2,400 students, we had 6,200 students. We were in quadruple session, classes started at 7:50, or whatever it was, and we went until about 5:50. We were on quadruple session. Now, the interesting thing about that, is that you had all the negative aspects of an incredibly overcrowded school

and, kind of, a factory-like atmosphere and there wasn't as much personalization because everybody would know everybody because some kids were in school and out of school before other kids even came to the school. So, you had that but the other thing that you had, which was such a great positive, was with that many kids you had kids volunteering for almost any course you could come up with. We taught eight languages at Andrew Jackson High School because there were enough kids for French, Spanish, German and, you know, whatever it was, Hebrew. We taught eight languages. I had kids sign up for acting classes. Well, I taught five classes, four of them were acting classes. I mean, it was heaven, by the way. I loved it.

The other thing about Andrew Jackson High School, which was very interesting, was that it was -- at the time I began there, in the very early 60s, it was a middle class school of blacks and whites, almost 50-50, 40-60, or whatever it was. It was middle class. Then the area of these little attached homes became -- were bought by the city and became welfare homes and you had a tremendous number of very poor families move in. And so, the school moved rather quickly in the '60s from a middle class, integrated school to a poor kid's school and you didn't have white flight, you had

middle class flight. The black middle class moved out as quickly as the white middle class and went to -- and there were new schools that were high schools that were built, Springfield Gardens High School just south of there and there was Forest Hills High School and Douglaston had a high school and so on and so forth. But what was really fascinating to see was that it was not jut white flight, it was middle class flight, both black and white.

Q: Right, and how did that affect the school itself?

A: The school became a much more difficult school. You didn't have as many kids who were interested in eight languages and all over the school deteriorated. It was interesting because it became a school that had many -- fewer kids. You know, you didn't have 6,200. As a matter of fact, it became such a difficult school and a dangerous school that it was eventually made into a magnet school with, like, 800 kids.

Q: Right.

A: But this was after I was no longer there.

Q: Oh, OK, this is after?

A: Yeah, I left in 1969 to go full-time. And that's interesting because -- what I was talking about, Al said with decentralizing -- and I should talk a little bit about decentralization to you because there's something important

there. Al said, if the city is going to decentralize the union has to decentralize in order to service its members. So, whereas before 1969, everybody who was working for the union -- there were a lot of part-time people, working full-time teaching and then after school work for the union. Everybody would go into Manhattan to the union headquarters because that's what you worked out of, or out of your car. I was elected, I guess, in 1967 or '68 to be the District 29 representative. There were 31 districts in the city. Al said we've got to have representatives in each of the districts because in decentralization, for each of those districts there was a district superintendent now. So, we needed somebody to interact. He didn't appoint them, they were elected by the chapter chairman, the building rep, in each of the schools. In my district, District 29 southeast Queens, there were probably about 30 schools, and each school's chapter chairman votes according to the voting strength according to the number of members. For instance, at my school we were on quadruple session, we had 300 teachers in my school. So, I was elected district representative in '67, I think. In '69 Al said we need a Bureau office from which we can service the numbers. And he asked me to be -- and that was an appointed position.

He asked me to be the Queensboro representative, and that I was from 1969-1975.

Q: Why don't we talk about the '67 strike, because the '67 strike leads into '68, which leads into decentralization.

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, you mentioned you had a huge class size problem at Andrew Jackson. Didn’t the 67 strike address class size.

A: It dealt with class size issues. I think that was also More Effective Schools.

Q: Yeah.

A: A Si Beagle’s More Effective Schools. That was interesting because you could see the union moving from its original needs, which were salary, working conditions --

Q: Bread and butter stuff.

A: Right, to the more professional issues. Now, those issues had always been important to us but they became more effective schools -- how to be more effective in the classroom in the elementary schools and how to reduce class size. I mean I remember having 42 kids in a class. I remember kids sitting on the steam heat. And what was important from the supervisor's standpoint, the principal's standpoint, was that it be quiet. You know, you were a good teacher if it were quiet (laughter).

Q: So, More Effective Schools was basically programs to, not only bring order into a classroom of 42, but a development for children from K through six all the way up through high school.

A: Yeah, most of it, as I recall, and it's hard, but most of it was elementary schools. It was a sense that -- it was part of the move toward a more professional approach to teaching. I really believe that the supervisors cared most about control, stability -- the teachers in the classroom really did want, by and large, to be effective, to see kids grow. So, More Effective Schools said, look, each teacher should not have to reinvent the wheel. A brand new teacher should not have to go in on his first day and have his supervisor say, I want you to write a curriculum for us. That really happened. I mean, it's hard to believe, right? I mean, a doctor goes in for the first day and the head of the hospital says I want you to write a manual for everybody on how to do brain surgery. It was insane.

Q: We were just talking about how More Effective Schools is kind of like a standard for teachers to follow.

A: Yeah, you shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel. There are certain things that teachers for 15-20 years, through a 25-year period learned that there are certain things you can do that work and other things that don't. Well, shouldn't

there be a maybe, not a manual, although a manual is a hell of a good idea, but shouldn't there be a way of taking all of that experience and providing it so that new people who come in don't have to learn it or it shouldn't have to take them 25 years. It took him 25 years, well, let's learn from him. Let's put together some manuals, some lesson plans. That doesn't mean that every teacher has to lock step, but give them something.

I remember the thing that helped me most at Andrew Jackson High School when I first began to teach was sitting in on the English classes. I would have to get permission to sit in because you didn't have a free period, but I would get permission instead of study hall or to walk the halls to sit in Bob Fitzpatrick's class. These guys who had been teaching for 30 years had certain little tricks that would interest kids, you know? And I would sit there and I would write it all down, it was great. It would've taken me 20 years to come up with some of this stuff. So, that was part of More Effective Schools. It was a more professional way of doing things, a sense that there are techniques, there are approaches that are better than others rather than, well, anybody can teach, just walk into a classroom.

Q: Right.

A: You know?

Q: Well, this all leads into 1968 though. Here you have a new way of education, and that's the integration or community control.

A: Yeah, but -- you see, the interesting thing about it is that it was portrayed as a black-white, as a community control issue. It was really apart of what I'm talking about, it was really a question of a professional dimension to this because if you believed that anybody could teach, if you believed that you just have to want to teach, you know, anybody who isn't doing well it's because they really are bad people, then you say -- the important thing is who controls. The interesting thing about Ocean Hill Brownsville is that there was no discussion about what actually goes on in the classroom. Decentralization and centralization is that it has nothing to do with teaching, it has nothing to do with what goes on in the classroom, it has to do with structure. Diane Ravitch wrote a wonderful book, The Great School of Wars, and in Diane's book she shows that every time the schools in New York City were found to be unsatisfactory, and they were centralized, the solution was we have to decentralize. Every time they were unhappy with the schools because they were decentralized, the solution was we have to centralize them, you see it

going on in New York City today, and in lots of districts. Nobody talks about what goes on in classrooms. They talk about who has the power, they talk about the structure of the system, they do not talk about what happens between kids and teachers. More Effective Schools and class size was talking about what happens between teachers and kids. And so, I put a feather in the union's cap for trying to change the nature of the discussion. Now, having done that in '67, along comes '68 and the discussion goes back to -- we took a step back because under the guise of there was a black, white problem, there was a community control problem, we were really talking about structure again.

Q: How did the conversation shift so easily?

A: It was shifted by the politicians. It was shifted by those who wanted the power in the districts because, look, you had lots of black parents who were right when they said, we're getting short-shift. We don't get the textbooks, look at the condition of our buildings, things are so bad that we've got to do something. OK, so you have the demagogues come in and say we can take the power that was part of the problem. If we get rid of those teachers, the white teachers, the Jewish teachers, and so forth, and bring in people who live in the community who know us, who are us, who are ethnic background, who are our racial

background that will solve the problem. Well, that's very heavy stuff, that's very attractive, and to politician's that was attractive.

Q: So, that's why the Ford Foundation was behind it and Rockefeller was fine with it?

A: Sure, and John Lindsay was. You know, he loved that stuff. John Lindsay -- there's another lesson to be learned. Bob Wagner was depicted as a friend of the unions, and he was. Bob Wagner would talk about the importance of the unions, but at the negotiating table Bob Wagner's people knew what they were doing and they were tough. John Lindsay was known as the scourge of the unions. He was really tough with the unions. Guess what? John Lindsay gave away the store and didn't even know it. I say that because I remember Dave Whitties who was our pension man, a wonderful man. I remember Dave coming back from negotiations in '69 maybe it was, and he said they have no idea what they just did. They had no idea what the costs are to what they just did because Lindsay had people who he had put in to negotiate because of their politics, not because they knew what they were doing. They didn't have any cost-out contracts. So, to the public, to the media, Lindsay was tough on unions. Well, he really wasn't because he didn't have the background and he didn't understand.

Q: Is that why in one responsibility Ocean Hill Brownsville became so volatile, because he allowed his internal people, his political people, to say this is a good idea. But, at the same time, they didn't know how to stand up to the union, which was weak itself as UFT --

A: But it wasn't even a matter of standing up to the union, it was a matter of being competent to know how to cost-out contractual ideas, you know? It was just amazing.

Q: Was he trying to appease everybody at the same time?

A: No, I think it was incompetence, I really do.

Q: Just incompetence?

A: Yeah. I mean, I remember Dave saying, they have no idea what they just did.

Q: (laughter) So, was decentralization a compromise then over Ocean Hill?

A: You mean a political compromise?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, I think decentralization probably was a political compromise although, it was a way of trying to -- remember, the strike was ugly.

Q: This was your first year or second year of being --

A: A building rep. Well, I was a building rep for or five years, probably, by then. But I was a district rep.

Q: How did you mobilize and educate your members in that area, on such an ugly strike?

A: You know what was interesting? The elementary school women were the toughest people. They were terrific. They were terrific people. I remember, clearly, there were people with guns, with rifles -- and I'm not making this up -- at schools when we were on strike. I remember that I would go to each of the 30 schools every day, every other day, I would make sure I touched bases and we would have meetings with the chapter leaders at the end of the day, - when we stopped picketing. There were teachers who went in -- and the black teachers in particular were under tremendous pressure to go in, and many of them did. But I remember that there was a reluctance on the part of the police to involve themselves in going over to somebody and saying you can't stand across the street from the picket line with guns. Now, the guns may have been empty -- they were there for a show -- but that happened. I have -- and I gave to Rick Kahlenberg all the stuff that had the names of certain teachers with nooses around, you know, pigs hanging up with nooses in the name of the principal and different teachers and all that. So, it was very ugly and we did -- the UFT did publicize the ugliness. A lot of people said you shouldn't do that, but we felt people should understand

what the heck was going on. So, I think that the decentralization where there was, on the one hand, the 31 school districts did receive certain power. On the other hand, they did not receive the ability to hire and fire at will and tenure was saved.

Q: That was still at the central board?

A: Yeah. So, it was a compromise.

Q: Was there any good out of decentralization for New York City?

A: What happened was as the years went by what happened was, not a surprise -- which was there was a tremendous amount of graft corruption. As that came out you started to have a movement away from decentralization, that's when people start saying the mayor should be in control. Again, fascinating. So, people who saw a structural change to decentralization as a solution to the school problems, they saw corruption and they said, well, the answer has to be centralization. People have very short memories. People are reluctant to talk about what actually goes on in the classroom, unless you're in the classroom. So, it was fascinating stuff.

Q: Now, I guess there was no teacher centers yet.

A: No, teacher centers didn't come until --

Q: The '70s and '80s.

A: Yeah.

Q: OK. So, what were some of your duties as the Bureau -

A: There were seven -- the Bureau of Queens, we had an office on Queens Boulevard and 67th Avenue, or something, it was in Forest Hills. There were seven districts, Districts 24-30, District 31 was Staten Island. District 1-5 was Manhattan, six through 19, or whatever it was, was Brooklyn -- whatever. There were five Bureau reps and we would meet once a week with Vito at the headquarters. In my office, and this was true in all of the offices, each of the district reps had their own desk, we had a number of part-timers who came in after school -- the district reps, at this point, we were able to negotiate full-time for the district reps and the Bureau reps. We hired, for after school, pension representatives, health care representatives -- you know --

Q: Here's all the in-service. Here's all the service that you used on educating them out on a complicated pension system, but also health and --

A: Yeah, we had people who were any teacher in Queens who was ready to retire this year, who had come in for a consultation. This is what your options are blah, blah, blah, and so on, and so forth. We ended up with probably about 20-25 people, 15 full-timers -- 12 full-timers and a

lot of part-timers, and that was true in all the offices. We also were -- at that time, the compromise for decentralization was that the high schools would remain centralized. The board had a Bureau representative for high schools, the superintendent for each of the five Bureaus. So, I would work with him for the high school stuff and I ran the office.

And that was from '69-75. In '75 Sandy became the director of staff, Vito had gone up and -- maybe she became director of staff before '75 because Vito went up in '72 or '73 to NYSUT.

Q: Yes.

A: And Sandy, at some point, became the staff director -- took Vito's place. Al and Sandy asked me if I would come in to work full-time at the UFT as director of grievances and arbitrations. I was responsible for grievances, arbitrations, I was responsible for the legal department -- at that time we had about a dozen lawyers, I guess, full-time.

Q: Gees.

A: Well, NYSUT has at least 25-30 full-time lawyers now.

Q: Yeah, but that's quite a job that they asked you to do.

A: And I did that from '75-78. John Finneran was the labor relation's guy for the city of New York, a decent guy, I

liked him. John and I would try to solve arbitrations before they went to arbitration.

Q: Seventy-five, a nice year to start as grievance officer.

A: (laughter)

Q: Good timing.

A: Yeah (laughter). You know, that was the bail out of the city, obviously the city was bankrupt.

Q: Thousands laid off.

A: Yeah, it was -- that was tough stuff. Al, God bless him, had to make the toughest of decisions, whether to bail out the city with pension funds.

Q: Right.

A: But, he recognized that if the city would go under the pension funds, well, they'd be worth paper.

Q: Yeah, they'd be worthless.

A: He took a big hit on that, because it was easy -- it was very easy to make a speech on that. You can't use our pension funds -- you know, but he was tough on it. I have to tell you that there was one -- you had it in here, a question about prior professionals.

Q: Sure, yeah, in '69.

A: I don't want to forget this. Al Shanker never, never threatened to leave the presidency of the union except once. You know the story then?

Q: Yeah. But I want to hear your side of the story.

A: Well, Al I remember at a Delegate Assembly when we were debating the resolution on whether or not we would organize paras, and there was that snobbery.

Q: It was basic snobbery then?

A: Oh, yeah. Well, sure, remember, put it into context. Context is community controlled the big battle of Ocean Hill Brownsville. They're going to come in, they're community people, they're really there to spy on us. Some people felt that way. Some people, we should be only teachers, we are professionals. You know, -- "we ain't workers."

Q: (laughter)

A: And Al said, I just want you to know that I don't want to be a leader. I don't want to be the leader, I won't be the leader of a union that turns its back on these workers and our schools. There were lots of good arguments that were used. Now, think about it, they're going to be organized. It's not a question of whether we're going to organize them or they're not going to be organized, would you rather have them with us, that we represent them? Or would you rather have Victor Gotbaum with District 37 represent them? And so, people began to understand that. Also, they understood that -- I think one of the arguments that worked, because

they saw it happen, they understood that as you get bigger and stronger you have more leverage. They understood that. The surprise to many people in the city was that the para-professionals voted for it and you know it was very close. I mean, it was something like 14 votes out of 1,000.

Q: Yeah, and some people said it was the District of Ocean Hill Brownsville that went to UFT that tipped the scale.

A: Yeah, I think that's absolutely true. And because what they were very smart people. They cared about strength. I mean, he's a tough guy, that's what I want.

Q: Were some people worried? Did they want to hide Al Shanker from this organizing drive?

A: I think some people, but most people did not. I mean --

Q: Because he's a tough guy, he stood up and --

A: He stood up for what he believed in, he was able to get things for his members, he was a presence in the city, he had strength, he had smarts, and people wanted that.

Q: Right, but District 37 was just as strong.

A: Well, one thing that appealed to people that, maybe in such a close election, made a difference was that we were a service organization, we serviced our members. That gets out and people see that. There are lots of unions that spend a tremendous amount of their money on organizing, political action, but not a lot that spend a good deal, a

very significant amount of their money on servicing their members. I think that's true.

It was an absolutely fascinating time for a number of reasons; because you did go from 2,200 members to 55,000 members over a decade -- less than decade -- because the nature of the conflicts were important. You had a sense of what you were doing was important. Important for gaining professionalism for teachers, important for dealing with big issues like who controls the schools -- they were big issues. And so, -- and also because there was lots of room for moving up in the organization because the organization was expanding so quickly. I felt badly later on because you know, once all the district representative positions were taken and the Bureau rep and, you know, all the various things, it was very hard for people to move in, they would have to wait for somebody to retire. It had a very different feel to it, this was a fascinating time. We were the luckiest people in the world, we really were.

Q: Yeah, you filled the gaps and ran with it.

A: I mean, being told I want you to open a Bureau office, from scratch and put it all together and service 110 schools -- I mean, the bureau of Queens was something like the 5th largest school district in the country, right? We had 1.1

million kids in the city of New York. You know, if you go down to the 10th largest district, you're probably talking 200,000 maybe, maybe. So, it was exciting, it was fascinating.

Q: Involved in every aspect of not only education, but socially what was going on and culturally what was going on.

A: Oh, yeah, it was very early on in this explosion of work that teachers recognized and that the union certainly recognized that the answer to our problems lay, not with the superintendent of schools, but with the legislator, with the city council, the funding mechanisms, the pension and the healthcare and all that kinds of stuff. So, we had to be political. There was that battle because there were teachers who had the view that we don't dirty our hands with politics. But once they saw the clear connection between the problems that they had and where those problems would be solved, and you have the right leadership, we moved pretty quickly.

Q: I imagine that it didn't hurt that also you were starting to set up these decentralized areas. So, more of the politics is a local aspect, you can see the graft, you can see the graft building.

A: The other aspect of it was that the union leadership did not see political action as the president and two, three vice-presidents go in and talk to the governor. They saw it as a grassroots activity, which really invigorated members and led to their ability to go in and talk to the governor.

Q: Right.

A: So, in every bureau office, in addition to the pension people and the healthcare people, there was the political people, the people who went and manned the phones for legislators. As a matter of fact, we used to use our phone systems, once we had the Bureau offices, to help. You know, we would call all our numbers and all that. And we would have pizza parties. I mean, it became what it should've become, which was a social thing as well. People got -- teachers got to know each other, there were marriages, really, there were -- you know, so it became part of the vibrancy and part of the life of the union. It wasn't, oh, yeah, all right, we want you to give money. We do want you to give money, but we want a heck of a lot more than that.

As the union became successful and got larger and larger, there were many of us who began to see that the success of

the union, the largest of the union, that you've got to be very cognoscente of how you maintain the joy of the union and the activism of the union rather than just becoming a big business.

I remember a conversation with Al Shanker when we got agency fee. Al said, you know, I'm glad we have it but it's a double-edged sword because now we don't have to go out and convince members to join, they have to pay anyway. And he said, you know, when we're all gone it's not that because we were special, but because of the nature of the structure of what was happening, he said there would come a point where we would probably be better off without agency fee because it will keep us (laughs) on our toes, you know? It would force you -- you can become very complacent with an agency fee, even though agency fee, I think, makes sense. Look, you're getting all the benefits of the contract, you should pay that portion of it…

**End of Audio File 1**

Q: Well, the UFT had to really move though when you got agency fee taken away for the penalty of striking in '75.

A: And that almost proved the point because people felt good about building something like that.

Q: I think that you almost got 100%, maybe even over sometimes (laughs).

A: It was very fascinating. So, that was '75 and I worked at headquarters from '75-78. Then, in '78, Al asked me if I would run for secretary treasurer of NYSUT.

Q: Speaking of NYSUT, were you involved in anything with the founding conventions, the merger conventions?

A: Well, I was a delegate --

Q: You were a delegate?

A: At all of the conventions.

Q: You were with UTNY delegate as well?

A: Yeah. I was not on the negotiating team that negotiated the merger.

Q: Right, who did you see? Here you are a delegate, Paul Cole in the back, microphone one or two, and he stands up -- do you think if he was going to put down the merger?

A: Well, I was -- now, you're talking about the NYSTA convention.

Q: Yeah. Oh, you weren't in there by then?

A: No, because that was the NYSTA members.

Q: OK, that's right.

A: But I was on the very first board of directors of the merged organization.

Q: With the little cards.

A: With the reds and the greens. I was elected to the board of directors from the very beginning in '72, which probably was one of the reasons that Al asked me to run in '78 rather than asking somebody else because by '78 I had a lot of relationships with upstate people because from '72 on I was asked to chair the convention committee of the newly merged organization.

Q: OK.

A: God, I forgot all about that. And so, I went around the state to talk about the newly merged organizations convention. It was just a way of starting to get to know people on the other side.

Q: Right. And you weren't -- what was some of the people's first reactions to you -- you, as the UFT representative, going upstate?

A: Well, it was very interesting. People have views of New York City. There are tough guys that chew on cigars -- you know, everybody has their stereotypes and New York City people have stereotypes of upstate people. I used to have people, after people got to know me, it wasn't unusual for people to say, you know, you don't sound like a person from

New York, you're kind of quiet and laid back -- which is probably one of the reasons Al asked me to go (laughter) because I wasn't screaming and yelling. So, people were kind of surprised, I think, that, you know, in their particular view.

Q: Right.

A: What was very interesting, too, is that the NYSTA people who came to the merged organization. Many of them were -- I don't know if I'm using the right term, but it was like they were born-again unionists. They were so committed to unionism, Paul Cole --

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean look Paul becomes secretary treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO and now that he's retired what's he doing? You know, he's got his labor history work that he does.

Q: Even Tom Hobart.

A: Tom. Sure, right. And this happened to a lot of local leaders, too, and they became so gung-ho for union. People who didn't have a longer background than some of us had --

Q: They knew all the words to Solidarity Forever, right?

A: That's right.

Q: All the verses.

A: They knew all the words.

Q: (laughter)

A: Can we take a three-minute break?

Q: Absolutely.

A: Good.

(break in tape)

Q: OK, we're back on.

A: OK.

Q: And we were talking about the born-again unionists of NYSUT.

A: Yeah, they were very committed. I think that just prior to the merger I think there was a sense on the part of the former NYSTA people, a real hesitancy. A feeling that they were going to be taken over. Part of that was -- it is not unusual or surprising because remember that most of UTNY 90% of UTNY was New York City. So, here we were, this tremendously large group that was very close and knit together. NYSTA was all the state -- they were large, but they didn't have a political caucus system where they were all together. They were afraid of this colossus that was going to come in. I think that's very understandable. The interesting thing was how smoothly it all went.

I mean, I remember the first meeting of the merged board where we voted with green or red and they voted with

green because we were three-fifths of -- you know, whatever it was. I can't tell you how quickly it moved from two camps to one organization. Really, it was pretty easy. I mean, it happened very quickly.

Q: Which is amazing because the rest of the country was talking of merger of AFT and NEA and even though they're locals they couldn't connect. I mean, Los Angeles did but Flint fell apart and this felt apart and this --

A: Part of it was leadership. Part of it was the nature of the challenges that faced teachers, you had the Jerabek Laws, you know about the Jerabek Laws?

Q: Mm hmm.

A: So, when tenure was threatened, the down state and the upstate both were equally threatened and they understood that we've got to get together.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, you and I are fighting each other but all of sudden the gorilla comes -- well, we've got to get together.

Q: Which brings up that that's why, obviously, NYSUT became a huge political force.

A: Yeah, but what I'm saying is, too, there was a personal part of all of this. People, I think, move pretty quickly to like each other and to get along. It was not -- you didn't have everybody sitting together at the -- I remember

the first convention and I remember UFT, because we were so big, we had like 650 delegates.  I remember saying, we shouldn’t all sit together.  You know, sit in groups and get to meet people and that happened and that really happened rather quickly.  I was asked to chair the convention's committee for the first convention and, on that committee, I think had eight people.  There were four from the former UTNY and four from -- they all came together so quickly.  It was just -- you know, it wasn't those four over there and these four over here, and I think the reason for it was that the nature of the agendas we had were real work.  How do you put this together?  I mean, we didn't have time to get into all that stuff and you'd find that somebody would support you who was a former NYSTA person and somebody thought that maybe that didn't work was a former person who was a, you know, UTNY person.  It just happened so easily, at least that's my recollection of it.

Q: Right, and is it easier to fight off the NEA raid with -- I mean, they didn't have much but it was a threat.

A: Yeah, by that time it was '78 -- no.  No, no, no.  That's right, it was '75.  Seventy-two is the merger, '75 was the raid?

Q: Seventy-four they were building it.  It was between '74-76.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: By that time there was so much interaction -- I remember Zita Araman, she was the president of the Great Neck Local, a very nice lady. She was on the convention committee and we just hit it off. I remember two years later when the NEA came in, I remember Zita saying to me, what are they, crazy? I mean, it was not, that's my former group or anything like that. It really wasn't. I think what people were most unhappy with, with the NEA, was that what they were trying -- it was clear that they were trying to split again and people had gone through 20 years of that, you know?

Q: Mm hmm.

A: Al said, just before the merger -- we had about 90,000 members and they had 110,000 or something like that, which made it easier to merge. And he said, one and one equals three. He said, look, we've been saying they're terrible, they've been saying we're terrible, and most people who aren't organized believe both of us. Now that we're going to be together you're going to see, very quickly, a lot of people who aren't in either organization are going to join us, and that's exactly what happened.

Q: Yeah, they just fell right in line.

A: Yeah, we went from the 200,000 to begin with to like 300,000 very, very quickly -- and then, of course, you had people who were attracted to the strength of the organization. So, you had the psychologists come in 10 years ago, or whatever it was. Why did they come in? For one reason, because we had strength in the legislator and they saw that all their problems were legislative problems. So, it was an interesting time, but it happened -- it was just -- it was nice and it was cutting butter.

Q: Right.

A: That's my recollection, maybe you're hearing something different.

Q: No, no, that's -- but, I just want -- there's a couple things I want to talk about NYSUT, especially with the growth. Since becoming -- and NYSUT became a huge thing, you are competing with SEIU then with the public employees federation.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember much about that whole -- fighting off -- I forget the other group. It was a state employee association that had a merger with SEIU and --

A: The year I became secretary treasurer, within a few weeks of me becoming secretary treasurer, or a few months, we won collective bargaining for the Public Employees Federation.

That was the combination of about 10 years of organizing. And during that 10-year period we had joint efforts with a number of different unions, and I can't recall but Phil Kugler will know all that stuff. But, finally, the SEIU NYSUT/AFT organizing drive won. Just as I was elected secretary treasurer, that's when they won. That was very interesting because, first of all, it was a hybrid. It was -- the idea was that we'll work together on this and if we win half will be ours and half will be yours and we'll figure out a way to do it -- they hadn't figured out a way to do it.

Q: Right.

A: And then when we won we didn't -- there were problems, there were financial considerations as to how this had to be done because the SEIU dues structure was such that the AFT/NYSUT due structure was much more. Neither side would have accepted that -- we were in this together, we all put our moneys in together, but now all of a sudden the AFT/NYSUT is going to have a lot more dues flowing.

Q: Right.

A: And that's because SEIU had its dues and AFTs dues were about the same, but when you added NYSUT -- NYSUT is worth twice what AFT is worth, so it would've been three to one. What we did was -- I remember Bob Porter asked me to

represent AFT, as well as NYSUT, at negotiations. We ended up where we made PEF a state affiliate unto itself. It was not part of NYSUT. Really, the reason we did that -- because I think one of the reasons that we got the votes was that NYSUTs political clout was very attractive to the public employees.

Q: Right.

A: So, what we did was we said, look, we'll house you in our offices around the state where you want that, we will work as one on political stuff, but you will be your own state federation. Therefore, you will pay AFT dues, not AFT and NYSUT dues. Therefore, what we did was AFT and NYSUT made a deal. I was on both sides of that table, I represented AFT and NYSUT but, of course, with Al and Bob being in on it. We said, because NYSUT is providing certain services that AFT would have to provide to pass as a state affiliate, we will split the AFT dues, and that's what we did. To this day, AFT -- I believe to this day -- AFT funds provides NYSUT with moneys from PEF because NYSUT provides services to PEF. So, it solved the problem of PEF, SEIU, and AFTs money flow, that it was equal. They have about 52,000 members so they pay on 26,000 to us and 26,000 -- whatever it is. At the same time, we still had the NYSUT connection in terms of maintaining relationship.

But it was not an affiliate relationship, it was a -- we're both affiliates of AFT, you're not part of NYSUT, and that satisfied.

Q: OK. That makes a lot more sense now.

A: OK.

Q: I've always wondered about the PEF structure, how they fell in line. Then, of course, the whole dues paying back, but that was something else.

A: That was just unattainable. You know, you can't say you've got to pay three dollars to AFT for every dollar you're paying to SEIU. First of all, it would've broken the bank and they needed the money to develop their own service structure.

Q: Right.

A: So, we recognized that.

Q: What was the response by the teachers?

A: To adding PEF?

Q: This was not a problem it was -- it would've been a problem if we had decreased the service aspect of teachers in order to spend money on the PEF fund, that would've been a problem -- (phone ringing) --

(break in tape)

Q: One other issue was with UUP that was another organizing battle and here comes a very large, higher-ed into NYSUT. I just read a little about it, was there an issue with UUP?

A: No, when I went up there full-time in '78 UUP was already in. No, I think that -- now, remember, you had -- I'm trying to recall -- in New York City, at the time of merger, you had two higher-ed entities. You had the AFL, AFL-CIO, AFT Local, which Izzie Kugler was the president, Phil's dad. Then you had the AAUP and the NEA-local, which was Belle Zellar. And so, when we merged, those two merged. So, that was not a problem. UUP was a very large local as I recall -- I'm trying to recall, was it Tom Manix who was a higher-ed guy who was in UTNY? I don't -- I shouldn't say, I'm not sure.

Q: OK.

A: But, I think UUP had -- and I'm not intimately involved with that stuff, but UUP had concerns that they were going to be in a union -- you know, those are workers in were professionals.

Q: Another elitist viewpoint --

A: Yeah, I remember when one of our people who was an elementary school teacher was trying to motivate the higher ed folks to join in New York -- I remember her coming back from a meeting and she said, what really helped most was

that after they talked about how they didn't think they should be part of the union, she said, I hope I didn't do the wrong thing but I asked them what their salary was. Then I told them what my salary was and how I'm an elementary school teacher, and it was more (laughs). And she said that was really helpful (laughter).

Q: (laughter) It usually is. So, what were some of your duties in '78? What were some of the things that you kicked off?

A: Well, you know, '78 was probably, as I recall, the only election that was a contested election for the leadership. You know that? Dan Sanders ran against Tom. Al asked me to run because he felt that there were financial problems at NYSUT and he felt -- he liked very much Ed Rogers, who was the secretary treasurer. Ed was close to Tom Hobart and Toni Cortese. Al liked Ed, he was a good trade unionist, but he felt that he wasn't right for that job. As a matter of fact, Al asked me -- and so, I ran for secretary treasurer against Ed -- by the way, who was an extremely decent human being, a very good guy. I liked him a lot and we had a good relationship. Dan Sanders ran against Tom for president and Nancy Kleintop, on Dan's slate, ran against Toni Cortese and Ken Deedy, on Dan's slate, ran against Paul Cole. I was not on any slate, I

just ran as an independent. Al said to me -- he said, and he knew that I had a relationship with Ed. He said, speak to Ed. He said, I don't have a problem with supporting Ed for a position as an officer, I only have a problem with supporting him to continue to be the secretary treasurer. So, I spoke to Ed and I said, Ed, if you ran for the vice-presidency from Long Island, I said, you could be supported. But he felt that he wanted to be loyal to Tom and Toni and he said, no, I just can't do that. So that election took place and it was a very close election, very close. Of course, Tom won and Al had taken the position that we need both of them. He was trying to maintain the organization, so we had a decision in the caucus that whoever won the presidency, the other one would be the executive vice-president. They were running against each other, and that's happened. Tom just barely beat Dan and Dan became the executive vice-president, and continued to do what he had done from '72 on, which was do all the legislative work. I became the secretary treasurer, Toni won, and Deedy won. That's when Paul Cole, within a few years, had the support now to be secretary treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO. I was secretary treasurer from 1978-1986, when Dan Sanders retired. Danny wasn't well by that point and, in 1986, I was elected executive vice-

president and went up and did all the lobbying stuff, from '86-94 when I retired.

Q: So, during this time as secretary treasurer, you're building NYSUT within, not only with the New York State AFL-CIO, but a presence in Albany and building the service structure of NYSUT to what it is today.

A: Yeah, it's amazing.

Q: (laughter)

A: During those years we put up a building. When I went up there we still rented at 80 Wolf Road. We rented two floors or one floor, whatever it was, and we expanded so quickly in the state that we realized that the place was really too small for us and, number two, it didn't make sense to rent, we should own. As a matter of fact, we took the position because we were getting so large and we had eight or nine offices around the state to service the locals. Remember, too, there were a lot of interesting things that happened at that time.

You had, probably, 10 locals that had 50% of the membership, or 45% of the membership. And then you had 800 other locals that had 50%, 55%. You had a fascinating organization. You had the largest local union in the world, almost 100,000 members at that point in New York

City and you had a local of six members, Shelter Island had six members. So, here you are with a need for a servicing program where you had 45% of the membership in locals that were so large -- now what are we talking about? I'm talking about Yonkers and Syracuse and Rochester and New York and some of the -- there were 2,000 member locals on Long Island. Some of the really large locals had enough wherewithal to service themselves, but you had 800 locals that couldn't service themselves. What did we do? We had a program that said if you can provide services you will get back money for the services that we're not providing. You're providing it yourself because it was untenable. You couldn't expect a local, like New York or Syracuse or Rochester, to pay its full dues to the state when the state wasn't giving it back. I mean, they needed the state not to service the members, they needed it for political action and for all those other things -- a pension reform -- for the things that they couldn't do by themselves. So, how the heck do you keep this together? Well, what you do is your providing certain things for yourself. So, you'll get part, you have to pay it to us because everybody has to pay the same amount, but you will get back a certain amount for providing services that we don't have to provide, and there was a formula. The formula is still there to this day.

Q: Wow.

A: And there were locals that were right on the edge of it that wanted that money back --

Q: Right.

A: -- right? And so, that was always a contention. At any rate, so what we did was we had local -- we had offices throughout the state, but we became so big that not only did we put up a building for our statewide headquarters but we bought buildings all around the state. We've got a lot of real estate now. We've got 500,000 members and you've got all that servicing to do. So, those were fascinating times.

Q: Just huge growth --

A: Yeah. I lost my thought. The fast growth was also a difficult thing for us in many ways. Staff was happy to organize it and bring people in but at the same time, they didn't see the staff growing as quickly -- you know, if you have a local of 50 people it may take you as long to negotiate a contract with 50 people as it does for 5,000 people. So, the staff would say, hey, you know, every time we organize the group we're giving ourselves more work because we've got to see a growth in staff. So, they began to be concerned with things which they should be concerned

with and that we, management, should be concerned with and that is class size.

Q: Right.

A: How many people do I have to service? And that became a bone in contention. I remember during negotiations when the staff wanted to be able to say let's have a formula, you know, and we didn't want to get into formula because how do you put together a formula for all of this kind of different, crazy stuff. But we recognized that that was a problem that we had to address and make sure that we did. And the staff did grow.

I don't think it ever grew as fast as any staff would want it to grow, but it certainly did grow to reflect the fact that we had --

Q: Didn't they strike one time?

A: Oh, yes. I was the chief negotiator in that strike.

Q: What was the contention there?

A: Well, it was interesting. As happens very often we each have our own view of the world, priorities, of what's important. I grew up in a situation where cars, the kind of car I had, was never important to me. I wasn't into cars --

Q: Right.

A: -- but the staff guys spend a lot of their time in their cars.

Q: They live in their cars.

A: A car is very important. Well, when I went up there in '78 was when gasoline when through the roof and we had 150 cars or something like that, that we rented, at leased. As we started to look at the prices of gasoline and the costs to us, so we knew we had to put these guys in smaller cars. I didn't think that was a big deal. It was a big deal!

Q: (laughter)

A: A car is a car, you know?

Q: Right.

A: Right? Wrong. Plus, -- before I went up there, for whatever reason, one of the guys who led the staff union was in charge of negotiating to get cars. Crazy. And so, we said management should be managing the cars (laughing), so we should do that. And some of the cars are really big cars. So we said that we would do that from now on and we also said that we needed to negotiate, not tiny cars, but smaller cars. That was a big bone in contention. In addition, I think that when I went into negotiations. And, by the way, I thought that the guys who negotiated were good people. I did something that I think they weren't used to, and that is that they came in with a set of

demands and we came in with a number of things that we wanted. They weren't used to that. I'm being as honest as I can here.

So, there was a bone of contention there. We came to an agreement with the staff negotiators the night of the vote and we shook hands on it. And they went into a membership meeting, I don't think there were a lot of people there and it was voted down by, I think, two votes, which was too bad. And we had a strike for two weeks. We ended up with a contract two weeks later that was not a lot different and that was the only strike that I think we had. So, it was contentious.

Q: Now, in NYSUT, the start of the membership organizing program, do you remember starting that in the early '80s?

A: Yeah, I remember that that was tied, in part, to the agency fee thing. Because once we got agency fee there was not as much motivation to sign people up. We had situations where a significant proportion of people in the unit were not members. And, by the way, some of them weren't members and didn't know that they weren't members because they saw money taken out.

Q: Of course.

A: A lot of people didn't even know they weren't members. So, because of that, we began to spend time on, you know, what's going to be the vibrancy of the union if you have a tremendous number of people who don't feel apart of it.

Q: You're running a business.

A: Yeah. Then it becomes business union. And so, there's a good bit of time taken with trying to sensitize the local affiliates to spend time -- and what we did was, as I recall it, we had certain incentives. I think if you organized so many more people you would get so much more for your service --

Q: Right.

A: It would go to users or something like that.

Q: Right. Right.

A: But, as I recall it, that was a reflection of the agency fee thing. And, again, people were so busy servicing members, too, that they didn't -- when they had agency fee they didn't think it was --

Q: They didn't think it was an issue.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah, but it's the lifeblood of the union.

A: Yeah.

Q: To have those members keep coming in.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Also NYSUT now becomes the big gorilla, or is starting to become a big gorilla in politics. There always is the story of the teacher's elected Cuomo over Koch.

A: Yeah, that was -- when Cuomo was elected Danny was still doing all the legislative stuff. So, I was not intimately involved with all of that. I really, probably, don't have a lot that I can say-- maybe on the internal stuff on the --

Q: OK. You're basically building up a new service…

A: From '78-86, when I was the secretary treasurer, it was building the financial health of the organization. It was interesting, we had growth but because we had growth we also had a lot of stress on the service organization and, therefore, we had to hire people, we had to provide more in the way of service benefits, there were all kinds of problems with the tax on pensions and changes in the health programs, and all that. So, we were at a time of expansion but one of the things that was really important was to get dues increases. I spent a good deal of time going around the state talking about the nature -- we had conventions every year talking about the need for increases. It was fascinating, we always got the increases that we asked for.

You know, you negotiate and get what you needed, but people would try to get you down and the board would make a recommendation. We always got it, but people felt that it was very important -- delegates to the convention felt it was very important for them to be able to say yes or no. Because I look back -- I came in in '78 and about '84 I looked back and I said, you know, if you look at all the increases we've gotten over the last 15 years, and every year it's contentious and you get on the floor and you have to -- oh, yeah, I've got to put together a campaign and a big booklet and all that and I said, you know what's been interesting? If you look out over all these years and if we had a formula and we get a formula pass, we don't have to go through this every year. I figured out what the formula would have to be to reflect what we had done. The formula was 2.5%, three, whatever it was. It was as the median salary of the teachers go up according to the state -- you know, I mean, it just fit. It was easy. And so I went around the state and I said, look, we knock ourselves out every year, we go back and forth, you always approve, OK? Listen, let's not drive ourselves nuts with this. If this year we put in this formula we'll get the exact same result. Voted down. They voted it down because they were

-- and I understand it. They wanted to be able to say yes or no and they have a right to.

Q: The power to. Yeah.

A: So, they voted it down but they voted the increase. I mean, it really is interesting.

And every year, when they ask for an increase -- they don't ask for it every year, but when they do they get it. But the delegates wanted the ability and, after it was all over, I said, yeah, they're right (laughter). You know? They're right. We'll guarantee it when you ask for it, but you've got to ask for it. It was interesting.

Q: That is interesting.

A: Yeah.

Q: It is interesting to see that because it would save up so much time on conventions.

A: Oh, absolutely. And, by the way, I would make the presentation when I went around to all of the -- you know, because there were election districts. The board was made up of the heads of the election districts who were elected by the leaders, the same way we did the UFT, the district reps, and all that. I would go around and I would explain this. They would all shake their heads yes, they understood it, but they (laughter) --

Q: (laughter) Did you also put together the conventions?

A: Yeah, but I -- by that time the --

Q: By that time it was run by itself.

A: Yeah, remember it's every year.

Q: Yeah.

A: By the way, that was another issue back in -- sometime in the middle '80s or the late '80s, I think, there was a lot of talk about do we need a convention every year? At the time that AFT went bi-annual. Look how much -- it costs a lot of money to put on a convention with 2,000 delegates or whatever it was we had, but the delegates wanted it and they were the ones who would vote on it. They liked going to the convention and they liked having, you know, going through resolutions and all that kinds of stuff. So, AFT was able to do it, but NYSUT was not.

Q: And they still go every year?

A: Every year.

**End of Audio File 2**

Q: Why don't we get back to when Al asked you to become vice-president of the AFT?

A: Well, what happened was there were -- at the time, there were about 30 vice-presidents throughout the country.

Q: And that’s about 78 --

A: Seventy-eight. And about one-third, 10 or 11, were from New York State. That was not disproportioned. As a matter of fact, that made New York State still underrepresented because, at the time, I think New York State was about 40% of the membership. So, we had about 10 out of 30, about one-third, and of that one-third it was, -- I think it was just part of what happened was that the officers of NYSUT became vice-presidents of the AFT. So, when I was elected secretary treasurer in March of '78 I was then asked by Al to be a vice-president of the AFT. So, I became a vice-president of AFT in 1978. When I retired from NYSUT in 1994 Al asked me to stay on and I said that I would like to. It was a non-paying position. I just did it because I loved doing it. I stayed until last year. So, I was a vice-president of AFT from 1978-2004, 28 years. I think I may have been the only vice-president who stayed on more than the rest of his two-year term after retiring. I think I am. It was during that time, frankly, that I probably did some of my most important stuff, which was chairing the Futures II Committee and being the driving force for the Solidarity Fund, which we've raised about five, six, seven million dollars a year for our political action program. So, that's the period that I can cover for you. And Al, by

the way, as the union grew, he needed more and more representation on the executive council with the vice-presidents so that now there are, I think, 39 vice-presidents.

Q: I think you're right. Yeah.

A: Plus three officers. They have a council of 42.

Q: What were some of the first duties, as a vice-president, that they assigned you?

A: Well, there was a carryover from years ago that vice-presidents would be assigned certain states. That was a carryover from a very early time when there were hardly any full-time people at AFT. So, vice-presidents would kind of be the AFT liaison responsible for their own state plus whatever states were possibly in their immediate area. And so, I was given Kansas (laughter), Alaska --and most of those 28 years my assignment was overseas, and that reflects the fact that very early on, and I don't remember what year but it was very early, Al asked me to chair the Democracy Committee, which is really -- we called it the Democracy Committee, it was originally known as the international affairs committee and I chaired that committee for almost the full 28 years.

Q: OK.

A: The other assignment -- when Ed McElroy, when he was a vice-president, chaired the COPE Committee. When Ed went to the Executive Committee, which was probably sometime, I'm guessing, in the mid-80s, Al asked me to also chair the COPE Committee. So, I chaired those two committees. COPE Committee, of course, was a committee that tried to be helpful to the COPE department in motivating affiliates to provide COPE monies, you know?

Q: Mm hmm.

A: You know that we can't use dues money for federal elections, so the only way that we can have a federal program of support to legislators was to collect free money, collect voluntary contributions.

Q: This is you working with Rachelle and --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- her department?

A: Yeah, but essentially -- I mean, what it was, these committees would meet, usually, at each council meeting, there were four council meetings a year. All you would do would be to try to motivate the council leadership to be more involved. One of the ways we did that was we would put out a list for every council member, this is how much you've contributed (laughter).

Q: (laughter).

A: And the other thing was to try to be of help in getting more grassroots involvement. And, by the way, that's something that Ed, I think, has taken very seriously in that he spends a good deal of time trying to go around the country and motivating grassroots activity so that -- I mean, it was clear when I was a legislative rep and I did all the legislative work for NYSUT. Of course I would go in and meet with the governor and the legislative leaders, and the speaker and all of that kind of stuff, but what was really affective was when you had our members in their districts meeting with them and coming to legislative functions that we would have for the legislators and they would see that the folks -- who were their constituents. That really made a tremendous difference. Ed is spending a good deal of time trying to do that, that's good.

Q: It does come very easy. He really likes that grassroots thing.

A: Yeah. I should spend a little time with you, before I forget, on the Futures.

Q: Do you want to cover Futures now? Sure.

A: Yeah, maybe so.

Q: OK.

A: Or at another time --

Q: Why don't we go --

A: By you. We don't have to do it.

Q: No, if it's on your mind we'll go with it now. But explain what the Futures Committee is and --

A: Yeah. There were two Futures Committees, Futures I and Futures II, back to the future.

Q: And I hear there's a rumor of Future III.

A: What?

Q: I heard a rumor (laughter).

A: Futures I came about as a result of a number of discussions on the Executive Council dealing with the whole matter of how the union approaches its very new constituencies.

Q: And these are the public employees, the nurses --

A: Yeah, and PEF comes in and we start to organize nurses and there were a couple of discussions at the council. Council meetings, by and large, were pretty good meetings -- interesting discussions. I remember a couple of times when Candy Owley would say, you know, this is all interesting stuff but it's all about education. Or the PEF folks would say, you know, this is good stuff but it's not a lot of -- and so, that motivated a lot of folks, particularly Al and Sandy and some others, to say, we really should get away because at the council meetings there is so much business that has to be done, it's hard to spend time and think (laughs) rather than act. And he said, you know, we should

really get away for three or four days and have a retreat and start to talk about how we deal with the fact that we are no longer just a teacher's union, we're becoming no longer just an educator's union, what is it that we are? What is it that we want to be and how do we want go there and blah, blah, blah? Al knew this guy, Mike Macabee, who we used as a facilitator and, out of that --

Q: Was this at Hilton Head?

A: It was at Hilton Head.

Q: Yeah, that's what I thought.

A: How did you know that?

Q: I know things.

A: (laughter)

Q: I'm your archivist, I know a lot of things (laughter).

A: Lock the closets! Well, it turned into about a years project and we had three or four retreats. Out of that came some very important changes. We said, look, if we're really serious about organizing -- first of all, we came to the conclusion that what we were was something that includes education but is not only education. We said what we really are is a union of professionals providing services to the public. That opened it all up. Then, we said in addition to the council -- number one, we are

getting so big that 38 or 39 -- what did we end up with 400 vice presidents?

There's got to be another mechanism to include more people in the thought process. Number two, there has to be an opportunity, not only for educators, but for all the other constituencies to go through the kinds of discussions on professional matters that education goes through without them having to listen to us. That's how we got to the different constituencies. So, now that you have five constituencies which are recognized in the constitution and now you have PPCs, a professional -- what is PPC?

Q: Professional --

A: The Professional Practices Committees.

Q: Yes, there you go.

A: Right?

Q: There we go.

A: OK, something like that. So, when the council meets for two days before or two days, after, the PPCs meet, and that was an opportunity to bring into leadership many more people without having 150 vice-presidents, you had members of the PPC. So, they were the up and coming people and a lot of the -- as the vice-presidents retire, a lot of PPC people are going to take their place as vice-presidents.

So, Futures I was significant in changing the way we think about ourselves in providing a change in structure for us to deal with the substantive issues that each of the constituencies need to deal with. However, we still maintain that once those PPCs come up with recommendations they still have to come to the body, as a whole, to the council. Council is still the official policy-making body, not the PPCs, but it's almost a rubberstamp unless it's something outrageously crazy. The nurses sat down, they spent six months on this, they bring it to the council, unless it's insane it's going to be approved.

Q: Right.

A: But the council still maintains its constitutional authority as the policy-making body when the convention is not together.

Q: This is, what, early-90s? So, AFTs staff is already a large organization all to itself, what was their reaction to the development of Future in creating the PPCs? Did they feel threatened? Did they feel input?

A: If they felt threatened I was not aware of it. We did have a number of top staff people participate by being resource people, by -- I don't recall if they were sitting at the table or not. I don't recall. So, that was Futures I,

substantive change in the outlook of the nature of the organization, substantive structural change to include the newly made groups. Futures II is Sandy and Eddie, but by the time Futures II came I was already retired from NYSUT, still a vice-president. They asked me if I would, instead of bringing somebody from outside like Macabee, would I run Futures II? Yes. Futures II was very different than Futures I. Futures I was there because fundamental changes in structure had to be made. Futures II was motivated by a sense that everybody in the organization, in this really big organization, wasn't really on board as to what our mission was. We had a tremendous number of state affiliates and local affiliates, but it wasn't clear that all of us had a common vision and mission. So we wanted a process which where the process was just as important, if not more important, than the product because it was designed to include as many activists as possible throughout the country to talk about what are the important issues that the AFT, and its affiliates, need to deal with and can we come up with something that we all believe in. The process was very important and I spent -- we spent, lots of us, the officers, council members, having meetings around the country. I went to almost every workshop, I went to the conventions, the state conventions, went to

conferences, and spent time talking about this and came up with a series of issues of political action, in the matter of affiliates, of the various departments working together rather than apart, which was always a problem --

Q: Oh, so you were talking to your staff, too?

A: Yeah. The matter of organizing and we would -- after I would give a presentation on the nature of the discussions that we wanted to have we would break up into groups of 10-12. So, there were literally thousands of members that spent 2-3 hours discussing -- and we would have facilitators write everything and bring it all in to us. When you look at Futures II I don't think there's anything in there that moved us in a different direction, it's not meant to. What it was meant to do was to provide something that represented a commonality of purpose that articulated what all of us concluded was the important three or four most important activities that AFT needs to address at all levels. This one, by the way, we brought to the convention and we asked the convention -- I mean, it was a booklet, but it was a convention resolution. It was kind of a way of saying we need a mechanism to bring some consensus on a very broad basis on what the important matters are that we deal with. Out of that came a number of activities. Out of that came creation of the organizing committee of the

AFT which, to this day, meets three or four times a year. Out of that came a whole series of recommendations on political activity and COPE.

Q: Does lead to the Solidarity Fund?

A: And it led to the Solidarity Fund. Now, the Solidarity Fund we did the same thing. It was usually the dues increases, it would be 45 cents per member, you know, 50 cents, 30 cents, and so on and so forth, but the year of Solidarity Fund we asked for $1.25 -- I mean, it was a big number. What we did was we said if we're going to ask for a significant increase forever, it has to be done in a way that it's not just providing resources to the national, it also has to provide resources to the state affiliates that they can use in the locals for political work. So, we came up with a formula. We started with 75 cents per member, 46 cents went to the state -- you know, whatever it was -- 29 cents went to -- and we went around the country -- again, we did the same damn thing. The process was what was important. There were people, particularly those from Florida, who got up and spoke about how difficult it would be and how there's too much money going to dues and, you know, you always have that. But the interesting thing was, and the thing I really felt best about with the Solidarity Fund, was that it passed almost unanimously at the

convention. I don't think there were more than four people who voted against it. So, there was --and, by the way, when we started this we said if this thing is passed 52-48, that's a loser. So, again, I want to talk about process because I think one of the things that really goes to the heart of AFT is inclusiveness. It really is important. I mean, it is a grassroots process and it's what, I think, makes AFT a union that is still able to thrive, although any local affiliate can leave anytime it wants. It's all voluntary and that forces leadership to be sensitive to membership, in a good way. That's what we did with the Solidarity Fund and with Futures II and it -- I think it strengthens the organization.

Q: Did it motivate the organization?

A: I think so. I mean, I see, in the years following Futures II and Solidarity, I see a lot of support for the stuff I those reports. I don't see backsliding and people saying, you know, why are we doing this? For instance, we also put into the guidelines, for the Solidarity Fund, that all moneys expended from the Solidarity -- we put in transparency. Not only will all the moneys expended go through the executive council, but every single convention will get a detailed report of, state by state, what they did with the moneys and they will get a report of all the

national moneys. Every delegate gets a list of this is how we spent the money. So, it builds in, well, what did I do with the money?

Q: Yeah, it's the accountability.

A: It builds in the accountability. So, I just wanted to say that because I think that's why I started, by saying that those two -- the process was just as important as the outcome, as the product.

Q: So, you're able to talk to the small locals with six members, and the same tome to the UFT, and to Chicago and to Los Angeles, and combined everything together. That's a huge undertaking. Future II address the issues with the large cities in the states and the small locals, meaning like Illinois -- Chicago has a large membership…

A: The one thing that still needs doing, that is a problem for AFTs state affiliates is that in too many states the large locals have not been able or been motivated to give to the state affiliate the strength that it would need to be more effective on the state level. On the one hand, it's very human and understandable that large locals would not want to give up certain powers that they feel they have. On the other hand, it's only a statewide organization that can create the kind of power that is necessary to represent even the large locals. I mean one of the wonderful things

about Al's foresight was that here he was the president of the strongest local in the country, and he still understood that he wasn't strong enough. He understood that even though there were 30 assemblymen from New York city, that there were 150 assemblymen throughout the state.

Q: Right.

A: And, throughout the state, he understood that it was important to have the city union support things that are needed by the upstate unions for the upstate unions to be willing to do the other way. That, by the way, that's why NYSUT and UFT supported what's called Safe Harmless, the small locals upstate. Now Safe Harmless is in the funding formula for state education. Those little locals, no matter what the formula is, they don't get less. They are saved harmless from getting less money -- and UFT supported it. It's also true that, as a result of that, when UFT had the Stavisky bill about funding in New York, we were able to get that through even though the governor was button-holing everybody up there because we had to override -- because the upstate locals understood that that was the interest of New York City and New York City had come to their aid. It's that kind of foresight that was so helpful in creating NYSUT into what it is today. That hasn't happened in most states yet. Now, part of that is because

a lot of the states just don't have enough of a constituency outside of the urban areas, but there are places where they do. It's interesting to see in the merged states -- in Florida, in Montana, in Minnesota.

Q: They're doing this?

A: They're doing this.

Q: Yeah. But you were trying to approach this with Futures II.

A: Yeah, well Futures -- yeah, but not directly.

Q: OK.

A: Not directly.

Q: Futures II also had a huge -- what most of the press talked about was the organizing, pushing the organizing again. AFT always been organizing. I mean, AFT has always had a budget that's more than most unions on organizing, what was the address there?

A: Well, I think that what -- one of the aspects of organizing at AFT was that most of the affiliates thought of organizing as a national function, but there were certain things in the state and it would be very helpful to have the state affiliates think of themselves as having an important organizing function again because unless you're big enough you're not going to be able to develop strength. So, to the extent that state affiliates are able to expand,

it's in their interest, not just for the people who are organizing, but for themselves. States are reluctant to do it. It's the chicken and egg thing because they don't want to -- they say, hey, we're a service organization. I want to organize, I understand that, but I'm not going to do it by taking money from my service and weakening the members that I have. It's as silly as that.

That's one of the reasons that, out of Futures II's organizing committee came a proposal that says that the national will provide funds, resources, for organizing to certain states but the states have to commit themselves to also put resources in. There's a formula.

Q: Right.

A: So, it's a way of trying to entice and motivate.

Q: Right. Were some of the states hesitant at first, the smaller states?

A: Yeah, well, some of the states are up to their ears in being attacked and just fighting the good fight.

Q: Right.

A: This is -- organizing takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of years just to get results. Remember, we said earlier, it took 10 years before we were -- and something

like four collective bargaining elections before we won PEF.

Q: Right.

A: Ten years.

Q: A lot of money and a lot of time and resources.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Right. Do you want to talk about -- one of the longest committees you've been on was Democracy Committee. Now, AFT has always been active with international. As you were saying, you have resolutions from 20s and 30s, Selma Borchardt was the AFT’s international person back then, and now you were you part of the international committee from the beginning?

A: Yeah, I was on international affairs, I think, right away and I chaired it very early on at the --

Q: Was this right around with Poland erupting?

A: Well, remember, Poland -- yeah. Poland -- it was the early 80s and Poland was -- Martial Law was declared and all the unions had to go underground. You had a series of events that took place around the world that Al Shanker, by the way, who was also the chairman of the AFL-CIO’s international affairs committee -- and Al was intimately involved. He was the motivator, he understood the connection between – well -- he understood that in order to

further democracy in the world and to strengthen it at home, he understood that you really had to fight for democracy all over the world. So, all of a sudden you had a decade, the '80s, where there were special, dramatic events that took place in Poland. Where's the leadership of the fight for democracy in Poland? The unions, the trade unions. In Chile, Pinochet -- the overthrow of Pinochet, where did it come from? Well, lots of groups, but one of the groups was the teachers, the Creole, the profesores. In South Africa, the Apartheid moment, the teachers played a tremendous role. During those years, during Apartheid David Dorn and I went to South Africa in, probably about 1980.

Q: You were in South Africa in 1980?

A: Yeah, as tourists. We were there to meet with the teachers and other union activists in the black community in Soweto. When went and developed relationships there. About three or four years later one of my proudest moments was when I was refused a visa from the South African government because they knew that we were there, and meeting with certain people and all that.

Q: How did you manage to get into the black community in 1980?

A: Through contacts.

Q: You had the contacts, but the government knew you were there -- what you were doing and you decided….

A: Well, we were there a couple of times. I was there as part of the AFL-CIO -- you will love this -- as part of an AFL-CIO study group made up of three white trade unionists and three black trade unionists, this was during the Apartheid regime. And the Apartheid regime was so weird that they allowed and remember now, the Apartheid regime wanted international recognition and so they allowed groups in at certain times. The blacks in our group -- of course, we would not go unless we could eat together, sleep in the same hotels together, and so on and so forth, and we were able to because the government said the blacks will be honorary whites, and they were whites, and they were allowed to do everything -- I mean, I remember reading the papers then, and there were lists in the papers each day, the following people who were colored are now considered black. The following people who are white are now considered colored, or back the other way, the following people who are Indian -- you could go and petition to change your…it was a fairyland. It was absolutely insane, but we went there as a study group.

We met with people in the -- we went to Durban and met with the leaders of the hemp makers, who make the bottoms of rugs, and met with the workers there. We were allowed to do all that by the way. I will never forget it, going there and the workers were saying, talking about a global view of the world. The workers, when we met with them, said we understand that the building of new homes is slowing down, is that true? Why were they interested in that? Because these guys make the wall-to-wall carpets. And if that's slowing down they've got a problem. This was back in the '80s. I mean, it's just fascinating stuff.

But, at any rate, what was very interesting was that in our dealings with the teachers and other union fledgling groups in South Africa, in Chile, in Poland -- now these were places that had caught the attention of the world. We were involved because we had these relationships and because they were involved, no surprise. Unions know that they can't have function in a dictatorship. Educators know they can't function as educators in a dictatorship, so what's the big surprise that these people are part of the movement? But, have you seen the 1990 AFT convention video -- international affairs video?

Q: Mm hmm.

A: Well, that showed all of that and I was asked a couple years back, five years or so, to put together a seminar workshop for our newer leaders to, kind of, make them aware of the history of AFTs international work. So, I had time on my hands and I said, I wonder if AFTs international preoccupation and emphasis on international affairs is because in the '80s we've had these dramatic moments or is it something else? So, I went back and I started reading resolutions going back to -- you know, we started in 1916. Holy mackerel. So, here you have 1920, "whereas in the war devastated regions of Austria and Hungary, the state paid teachers in common with other public employees are paid in a depreciated currency and receive salaries too small to support life" -- you know, and so on and so forth. 1920. In 1920 it probably took six weeks to write a letter to find out about it. And six weeks more -- this is -- by the way, 1920 is when the union's treasurery was something like $122. There were writing resolutions about the teachers in Austria-Hungary. I'm on a kick, forgive me.

Q: Go right ahead.

A: Wait a minute. 1936, this is a discussion on the floor of the convention. "I wish to make a statement, right here, whether you agree with me or not. If I were in Spain now I would put a musket over my shoulder and fight on the

popular front, applause. If anybody wants to take up a collection I will contribute out of my small needs. Nevertheless, the problem is here. Are we going, as a convention, to try to save Spain and interfere in the Spanish War?" I mean, you've got stuff here -- there's a resolution in here -- I don't have it right in front of me, from 1924 or 25, a resolution that said we should create an international affairs committee and then, parentheses, non-paid, end parentheses.

Q: (laughter) You show that to David Dorn (laughter)?

A: 1939, "resolve at the AFT convention assembled hereby places itself on record as favoring a consumer's boycott of all goods and materials produced in Germany, Italy, and Japan. Why? Because they have abolished democratic forms of government, destroyed trade unions, persecuted racial, political, and religious minorities, and violated the national independence of other countries," -- and it goes on and on and on.

There's the '40s and the '50s and the '60s. So, what you have here is creation of a union by a series of people who, even back then when you didn't hear what the hell was going on for three months across the Atlantic, were vitally interested on the basis that they understood that we're out

to support democracy, all the things that they believed in, a public school system, where people could really question instead of just sit and listen and write. A trade union movement where people have the right to join together. You know, all of those things. That comes from the very beginning of this union. So, it's a mistake to think, and I've heard people say now, wow, you know, we were so lucky in the '80s. We had drama, we had Chile, we had South Africa, we had Poland. Hey, we had Austria-Hungary that nobody knew about in 1920 that the delegates at our conventions -- and, by the way, do you know how many delegates went to these conventions? Seventy-two.

So, there is an understanding of the importance of freedom and democracy, freedom and association, rule of law, so on, and so forth. That's not just something that history teachers want to teach, that's something that's in the gut of AFTs teachers and members. And, by the way, this stuff -- you know, we're part of Education International, we're also part of -- because the nurses are with us and because the public employees are with us we're part of the International Trade Secretariat for Public Employees. The nurses bought right into this. The nurses have been in South Africa on the AIDS matter. AFT nurses making presentations at the AFT executive council on the need for

us to be supportive of the AIDS programs in those countries. When I went to South Africa four or five years ago, boy I remember – I had to represent AFT at the South African Teacher's Convention. Guess who it was who fought with the government -- you know, the guy who took Mandela's place has said AIDS --

Q: Wash your hands or something like that. Yeah.

A: Guess who is fighting them? CoSADTU and FoSADTU, the teacher's unions of South Africa watched a film at the convention of the president of the South African teachers, who is now also the president of EI, drawing blood, saying it's OK to do this. We have to do this, we have to know if we are infected or not. I mean, it's really dramatic stuff.

Q: That's huge.

A: So, international affairs is not a thrill, it's part of the gut of the organization. I believe it always will be. And I think it's what motivated me to be a part of AFT for as long as I was there.

Q: The international issues?

A: Yeah, I think so.

Q: And convention still brings in international guests arriving from fledgling democracies, the AFT brought in the

Chinese who were set up in Tiananmen Square and, most recently, had a woman who wrote Reading in Tehran --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- recognizing that there is a tint, a spark of democracy within these countries and AFT brings them out.

A: And, every year at the human rights luncheon we give the Bayard Rustin Award, which is an international award for those who have promoted human rights and democracy in the world and so on and so forth. So, it's built in, it's built in.

Q: What else has the AFT done to bring in teaching to new democracies -- like, the eastern bloc was down, democracy is a strange word to a lot of these teachers because they have not been able to teach democracy. Did the AFT set up funds or organizations to help teach democracy?

A: Yeah, AFT Democracy Committee has a budget for things just such as this. If you look at the minutes of the democracy committee meetings you will see a whole series of recommendations for funds, some as little as $2,000, some as much as $30,000 to go to various teacher groups in Africa, in Asia, you know, in all parts of the world to help them fund various programs that have to do with human right, that have to do with democracy building, that have to do with developing teacher curriculums. There are --

David Dorn can show you all kinds of lesson plans and curricula and stuff on how does a teacher function in an open society. What's the nature of the difference as to how you teach a class? The Socratic method and so on and so forth.

Q: Right.

A: So, it's all there.

Q: And this is the National Endowment for Democracy?

A: Well, the National Endowment for Democracy, -- Al was on the board, Sandy was on the board, Ed is now on the board. The National Endowment is funded by Congress.

Q: Right.

A: It's part of a -- but that is a separate entity. That's not part of AFT.

Q: But didn't AFT develop this idea?

A: Well, we're supportive of it.

Q: OK.

A: We were supportive of the creation of it.

Q: Right.

A: That's Carl Gershman

Q: Going back to Poland.

A: Yeah.

Q: UFT was the office for Solidarity for a while. I remember Tom telling me the story that Al calls him up and said, you

got room?  We need room in NYSUT's office, we need room in the UFT office.

A: Right.  Yeah, we had -- we were able to -- with the teacher leaders of Solidarity -- the two teachers who were leading the Solidarity teacher's wing were on the Solidarity executive committee.  I believe that they were the only two who were not caught during Martial Law, when they had to go underground.  That was Victor Korarsky and Andre Janovsky. When they came here, and they came to Albany, I remember Barbara said, they're probably spending all their time in hotels, let's have they stay at the house.  So, they stayed at the house with us and we would talk all night long -- and these guys were wide awake and, in the morning, they would go to sleep.  At one point I mentioned to them, I don't know how you guys can stay up, and they said, well, under Martial Law, the only time we could do anything was at night.  So, we would sleep all day for a number of years.  I mean, they couldn't see their families or anything, but they would be able to get out at night.  So, when they came here these guys were night owls.

Q: (laughter)

A: I mean, they were fascinating.  But what was interesting was that there was a close relationship and even in the underground there were ways that we were able to be

helpful. When Solidarity won and the Soviets were gone and the government was overthrown and there was an election, well Victor Korarsky and Andre Janovsky became high officials in the ministry of education, and were smart enough to know that they had to give up their positions in Solidarity, in the teacher's union, they couldn't sit on both sides of the fence.

The first time I went there was when the Soviets were still in charge, Jaruzelski was still in charge. I remember going there and it was Maxim Gorky's The Lower Depths. Nobody smiled, everybody walked with their head down, really, all the soldiers with rifles at the airport. A year or two afterwards I was invited over to meet with Victor and Andre at the ministry and, in a matter of two years, you drove into Warsaw and there were young people walking hand in hand, there were sidewalk cafes, people were laughing and smiling. It was just incredible, it really was.

Q: What a turnaround.

A: Just unbelievable.

Q: And I imagine the same kind of feeling when you went to South Africa.

A: Yeah. So, I mean, Ed McElroy said to me once, and I'll never forget it because I believe it also, he said, you know, if I buy the farm today AFT doesn't owe me a thing. They have done such wonderful things-- and I feel that way. I mean, it just opened a whole world to me, you know?

Q: Oh, absolutely.

A: Go back to the beginning, I was a kid whose father owned a candy store. Through the union movement and education and knowing Al Shanker a whole world opened to me.

Q: You said you visited what, almost 40 countries?

A: Yeah.

Q: Participated in some of the most groundbreaking events internationally.

A: Yeah. So, you know, AFT doesn't owe me a thing (laughs). I owe the AFT. Yeah.

Q: Another question about Chile -- what's his name Osvaldo --

A: Osvaldo Verdugo.

Q: And he's the one -- you invited --

A: He was the president.

Q: He was at an AFT convention was he not?

A: He was at a couple of AFT conventions and he invited us to be international observers, about -- I think about 20-25 of us went and were international observers for the plebiscite as to whether or not -- the vote is to whether or not

Pinochet would continue as president, to have another term of eight years, and it was vote NO.  I should take you upstairs before we leave and show you some of the signs and stuff.

We went and I was assigned with Tony Ramirez.  Tony was a wonderful guy who was a reporter for the UFT newspaper. Antonio Ramirez, terrific guy.  Tony and I were assigned to a place way out.  We drove for two hours to watch the vote. The most important thing about that, for me, was to see how even in dictatorships world opinion is very important to them.  People who you would think, these guys are dictators, they don't give a damn what anybody else thinks. Oh, yes they do.  They care. When people write letters to General Mobutu about somebody who is languishing in jail, they say, oh, this isn't going to make a real -- it does make a difference.  I remember when Vladimir Bukovsky, who was a Soviet dissident, and when Jaronsky, who was a Soviet dissident, when they got out one of the first things they said was we knew, in our jail cells, when people were fighting for us and that's what gave us sustenance and kept us going.  It makes a difference, it really does.  I got off my point, I was just going to tell you something about --

Q: The elections over in Chile. How you got sent up to some little town with Tony.

A: And we were told that we would not stay in a little town because they were afraid that there might be trouble. We were taken to a place way outside of town and, all of a sudden, we go into a driveway and the driveway goes for a mile and you come up on this magnificent building, hotel, really weird. We go inside and there are -- I guess they figured it would be safe because these were supporters of Pinochet, there were pictures of Pinochet. There's a woman -- this was 1980s, about 40 years after World War II, and there's a tall, blonde woman with a thick German accent who owns the place. She welcomes us and I say to her, this is a wonderful place you have, how long have you been here? She says, oh, we came about 40 years ago. I felt sweat going down my leg because I knew what that was.

But, at any rate, the next day we went to observe and people were very solicitous of us. You know, the international observers have come and there were long lines and people stood in lines in the hot weather for hours and hours and hours and nobody complained because they were given a chance to vote.

Q: Right. There were no troops around or there were but --

A: Few were -- right. Yeah. No, but it was OK. And I said to myself, gee, how many Americans would stand for six hours (laughs)?

Q: Yeah.

A: But, of course, Americans vote every couple of years. These folks -- that was the one -- I think that was the one where Tony Ramirez, who was going to write articles, said to a woman in a line, how long have you been waiting? And she said 40 years.

Q: Were you also an election observer in South Africa?

A: No.

Q: No? You didn't go --

A: No, I was not. I do not recall why not.

Q: But you've stuck to the international thing, just shifting a little bit. You also dealt with democracies, established democracies and their trade unions, France and Japan. Actually, I want to know all about France. Wasn't there always an issue with the French unions, Communist control, the democratic control?

A: Oh, sure. Remember, that goes back to the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. When the Marshall Plan was put together, the Communist unions in France and more of the dockworkers refused to offload the goods -- the Middle East goods coming from the United States because

they didn't want the economy to prosper, they wanted chaos so that the Communists could take over. It was through Irving Brown and others in the AFL that they were able to get the democratic French trade unions to, literally, battle in the streets with these guys so that they could offload. I tell you that because -- and the truth is that they saved Europe.

Q: Right.

A: So, there is that history. In France, in particular, you've got the dichotomy of extremely active, committed Communist unions and extremely active, committed democratic unions. It goes back --

**End of Audio File 3**

A: -- even further than that. You know, I don't know a lot about that part -- by the way, if you ever want to read a fascinating book on the history of the trade union movement during that time, Roy Hudson -- I don't know if you know Roy. Roy did a book in 1975, which I read last year or the year before, that's a fascinating piece on all of this stuff.

So, the French unions had -- you had the Communist French unions, you had the democratic French unions, and you had

mergers, and I can't give you chapter and verse. David Dorn can give you a lot of that stuff.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I remember representing AFT at the French Teacher's Convention, back in the '80s sometime, and you could see the groupings, you know? It was fascinating.

The Japanese were very close to us. There was a president there called Tanaka, T-A-N-A-K-A, who was very close to Al. He had a lot of -- there was a very substantial Communist trade union there and he was able to wrestle control of the union from the Communist group. He was interesting because he was also very interested in professional development. He and Al were very, very close. The French, of course, we've learned a lot from the French in terms of their dedication to early childhood education. There, in France, I think the kids still come to school at age three. And the results are very -- very eye-opening.

There's an interesting story about Japan that is an example of how our international connections are meaningful to us, you know, work here in combating anti-education, anti-public union stuff. There was a study, I think it was one of the right-wing groups saying, do you know in Japan the

teachers spend many, many more hours in school than the American teachers? The American teachers, they should be working at least eight or 10 hours, the teachers in Japan do. So, Al looks at that and he says, let's find out what's going on over there. He calls Tanaka and a couple of our people go over there. Guess what? They're doing what we've been calling for a long time. They teach fewer hours than our people, but they have a lot of collegiality. They have a lot of time built into their day when the teachers meet, talking about teaching.

Q: And they're actually being paid for this.

A: And they're actually being paid for this. So, what began as an attack on us, because we had relationships there, we were able to turn around and say, guess what? Number one, they don't teach as long as we do. And their there, because they've been doing the things that we've been calling for, teachers working together during the day -- so, you know, it was really very interesting.

Q: That is interesting. That's a nice turn around, yeah, the same thing also -- I guess the same thing is that Al went over to England and discovered the teacher centers and brought them back.

A: Same thing now when Gennie Kemble and the Shanker Institute are talking about workplace development and having, and

bringing, and going over -- a number of us went over there a year and a half ago to meet with the trade unionists who have been able to get government funds to fund programs of continuing education for workers, particularly in industries where the industries are downsizing and going out of business. And coming over here and talking to our people about how that's done and how to get government support for it. It's very interesting stuff. So, that still is all of the piece and all going on.

Q: Excellent. Anything else you want to add on to the international issues before we move on? And one of the last things, I guess -- one of the last thing that Al actually spoke at, I think, was the Formation of CIVITAS,

A: CIVITAS is an organization, a loosely knit organization, of educators for democracy throughout the world. There's a lot of foundation grants to promote democracy and teach civics education. CIVITAS was an attempt to bring all these groups together. There really never was an international structure to bring all these various groups around the world, who have this commonality of interest, together. CIVITAS was an attempt to do that.

When Penn Kemble was the acting director of USAID he funded some -- he was able to put in some seed money to create

this CIVITAS thing. There are a number of others-- Chuck Quigly, I don't know if you know Chuck, who have grants from the government on this stuff. Penn saw this as a -- the potential for an international movement.

Q: Right.

A: With Penn's death, I don't know where it is now.

Q: No one really knows where the social democrats are either, since Penn's passed --

A: You know the social democrats are, as an organization, are -- look, social democrats was never really a huge organization, but it was incredibly effective in that you had six, seven, eight people who really were movers and shakers.

Q: But, on that, we can talk a bit about more AFT and -- you know, we talk about the '80s international, but '80s in AFT, that's the shift, -- it was a huge shift from, not only this being a trade union for teachers, but here we are as a union for professionals. Shanker started to introduce new ideas of collective bargaining, as a professional, being treated as a professional, along with the education revolution, and then 1983 and '85 strikes with these ideas. So, you know, this whole idea of education reform movement in the '80s and AFT being right in the middle of it. There's all of this rumor and story that when the Nation at

Risk came out everybody was sitting around for that, what's Al going to say?

A: I think there's a good bit of truth to that. Kind of go back -- to get into this, let me go back to Ocean Hill Brownsville.

There's a connection. After Ocean Hill Brownsville I think Al was disturbed that his persona, his public persona, was as this tough labor leader who was accused of racial insensitivity -- now, by the way, here's a guy who was working in the south for the Civil Rights movement when it was pretty tough to do that, but his public persona was the opposite. I don't think he was unhappy at all, he was viewed as a tough labor leader, but he wanted a way of getting involved in creating an aura, a vision, a mood, as someone who was really intimately interested in education and professional development. And, at the time, Arnold Beichman -- you know Arnold Beichman? Arnold Beichman was the guy who Al said -- said to him, Al, you should write a column in the New York Times which, of course, became Al's famous column in the New York Times where dealt with a whole series of issues but, most of all, he dealt with education, with international affairs, with democracy, and all that, but it gave him a platform. It did give him an

opportunity to become a statesman in education, a voice that people respected. I mean, a lot of people in the highest positions in Washington read his column every Sunday. So, that created an ability -- it gave Al a credibility as an educator and that's why you say people were interested in knowing how Al would react. The knee-jerk reaction, because it was so critical of education, the knee-jerk reaction would have been to dismiss it, to attack it, but Al saw great opportunity. I've got to tell you, I don't think that Al -- I think in his gut he just realized that a lot of it was true. Al was -- it was incredible that he would really say what he felt. I think he knew that he might be putting himself at risk by taking the position that he took, which was supportive of so many of the conclusions, but he really believed it. I think that, by that time, he had developed such credibility as a statesman that people were ready to listen. I don't recall a lot of -- there may have been, but I just don't recall a lot of pushback against his position. Although, I would think that at probably at the very beginning there might have been.

Q: Oh, sure. I think the -- actually, I think the biggest battle over education reform on council was when the -- Dal Lawrence brought his peer review

A: Yeah, that's true.

Q: A lot of council were saying, you can't do that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Al Fondy of cour --

A: Walter Tice.

Q: Walter Tice.

A: Al Fondy That's true. I take it back, you're right. I was thinking more in terms of the membership delegates and so forth.

Q: Membership, I think --

A: The council, though, you're right, there was a lot of pushback.

Q: Yeah, membership went right along with it, they'd saw that it was needed.

A: Yeah.

Q: That was needed and Al made a great point. We could fight it on the outside, but we're going to go with it and be on the inside.

A: Yeah.

Q: But here's the whole shift for AFT from fighting, not only politics in the '70s and surviving the '70s, moving into more of a professional development. It was talked about, but on a national level now. It pushed AFT where NEA was going more of the radical side.

A: Yeah, and it gave Al the opportunity to move even further because I see a connection between that position that he took and this his call for a national teacher's credentialing, licensing.

So, he really was able to change his persona from tough labor leader to education statesman on substance. In other words, it wasn't smoke and mirrors. It was real, he really did have important ideas. Yeah. So, yeah, I think you're right when you say people were waiting to see him.

Q: Because this is the big chance, the big opportunity.

A: Now, by the way, contrast that with how the trade union movement, as a whole, in the last 10 years, has refused to look for ways to be influential with respect to globalization, just knee-jerk reactions. I mean, the standard labor union in this country -- yeah, it's true that there's a lot of attacks by far right, but the labor movement itself has lost its way because it has forgotten what the nature of a federation is.

Q: Whereas it seems the international unions, with the latest merger -- international merger creating the IE, it looks like they're looking forward to, moving forward.

A: What's the nature of a national federation? The purpose of a national federation is to create a mood in a country, to

create a voice, a national voice or a particular perspective for working people but, for the last 10 years, you have a movement which thinks of itself as a local. The most important thing we have to do is organizing, be affiliates of the organizers. The most important thing that the federation has to do is to create a mindset in the minds of workers, in the public in general, as to the value of a free trade union movement in a democratic society, not to be the organizers. You want to be an organizer? Go work for a local union or a state affiliate, but if you're going to be a leader of the federation, your job is to create -- I mean, there was a time when you would turn on Meet the Press and there would be George Meany. There was a time when Lech Welesa wasn't sure whether, when he flew here, the first person he wanted to see was the President of United States or Lane Kirkland. There was a time when the commission on Iraq would have had a George Meany or a Lane Kirkland or a Tom Donahue on it.

Q: Now we're begging to be in.

A: Because they had a broad view of the nature of what the movement is. Were they right all the time? Were they successful all the time? No, but what happened is I think the movement has lost sight of what the movement is.

Q: Actually, I think we've almost covered everything.

A: Great.

Q: We could do this wrap up stuff. I mean, you already started with what's happened with the labor movement, but is NYSUT and UFT basically sticking to what they started out to be. And, of course, they haven't but with changes and -- are they going to be a major leader in the movement?

A: Well, you know, we didn't talk at all about AFTs attempt to merge with NEA, really.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: I think that one of the things that AFT -- I have to come at this in two ways. Both NYSUT and AFT are going to grapple with their success with their bigness; NYSUT half a million, AFT 1.3 million, and I say that as someone who is one of the luckiest people in the world having come up during this magnificent growth in perspective as well as membership and resources and, you know, everything else. So, here you have success that makes these entities so big that it takes full-time just to run what is there. And so, in a sense, I feel empathy for leadership from here on in to be able to surmount the burden of running efficiently a very large organization that services people, and have the additional burden of creating a vision and a mission which needs to be part of the overall movement of America, which has to identify with what is good for America.

One of the things -- I talked a little bit before about the British with lifelong learning and workplace development. How did they get all that money from the federal government? How did they get all of it? They did not talk about the union. They didn't talk about the fact that the union was going to lose members and, therefore, they didn't view the problem as a union problem, they viewed it as a problem for the British government, for the country. They said we need to develop our citizens to be able to participate and support all those things that the country needs. They talked about the country. And so, it's very hard, now that we're big, now that we've got so many constituencies, it's going to be very hard for the new leaders to be able to manage all of that and still have the retreats that give them an opportunity to look at the bigger picture because, in final analysis, their job is not to manage. Their job is to create the connection between what is good for the union and what is good for the country. That's hard (laughs). Particularly when human nature is such that what you want to concentrate on are the things that are easier to do.

And it's really easier to manage an organization with all those difficulties than it is to say how do I want to move

the ship? Which way should we want to go. So, the last thing I would want to say is that I really feel like the most fortunate person in the world. I just couldn't be happier with what the union has done for me. I really mean that.

Q: Yeah, as you said, Long Island, father was a candy man, to international traveler, heads of state --

A: The first Christmas that he [Clinton] was President we got invited to the Christmas Dance in the East Wing. Barbara and I were dancing to the Marine band in the East Wing and I said to Barbara, my father owns a candy store, what am I doing here? And she said, dance, dance.

Q: Beautiful. Thank you very much.

A: Hey, thank you.

**End - Herb Magidson**