

toward teacher power

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TOWARD TEACHER POWER

The 1960's were the halcyon days of the teacher movement. It was a period of rapidly rising salaries and employment, of rising self-confidence, of a belief that militant unionism provided the tools to win teacher rights and change the schools.

Today, from coast to coast, the movement is in trouble, under attack from all sides.

Money for schools is in increasingly short supply. Teacher unemployment is 10% nationally, and rising. Teacher salaries are falling in real terms. (Salaries rose 3.5% this year, while inflation will be easily double that amount.) Our income is also falling relative to the income of other organized workers, whose increases, while inadequate to meet inflation, were nevertheless higher than ours.¹

As for the classroom itself, city schools, as a result of population shifts, are even more segregated than they were a decade ago.

Rising costs are accompanied by declining achievement levels. In NYC 2/3 of all elementary school pupils read below the national norms for their grades. And despite the maxim that, in education, every experiment is doomed to success, experiment after experiment in educational reform somehow always ends up in a disappointment, when not an out-and-out failure.

As a result, the status, the self-image, the feeling of achievement and self-confidence which welled up in teachers with the rise of unionism

¹(a) over-past two years, of 37 occupational groups, only 4 have suffered more than teachers from inflation

(b) 1972 SALARY INCREASES BY INDUSTRY

Teamsters	— 6.2%
Steel	— 6.8%
Rubber	— 7.1%
Electrical	— 6.7%
Postal	— 7.0%
TEACHERS	— 4.0%

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are all suffering a severe decline, while feelings of alienation and helplessness come to the fore.

We appear in short to be in danger of returning to the situation which characterized teachers 20 years ago.

These developments are doubly intolerable to teachers and parents because they occur on the heels of a period of rising expectations by both teachers and communities in the 1960's.

What happened to teachers and the schools in the 60's which made that period so special? And what can we learn from it?

THE 1960's—

The stultified, conservative form and content of US education in the 1950's was drastically shaken up by three powerful detonators: The post-war population boom; the civil rights explosion—whose modern history dates from the 1954 Supreme Court decision rejecting segregated schools as inherently unequal; and only two years later, Sputnik—the “scientific threat” to U.S. hegemony in the cold war.

The consequent demand for integration *and* for better schools, especially in science and math, led to a vast outpouring of funds for education.

This flow of funds and the increased prestige for teachers had their inevitable impact upon teacher self-awareness and self-confidence. The result was a molecular process of slow, often hidden changes which burst forth in the first great teachers strike in American history, the 1960 NYC strike. The movement spread like a prairie fire. It put teacher strikes and teacher unions on the map.

Until that time, the teachers movement had been dominated by the million-member NEA—at that time a chemically pure company union, instrument of the school boards administrators, closely linked to the American Legion, thoroughly racist, and “professional” in the bad sense of that term.¹ It was an organization totally unprepared for the “new teacher.”

¹If by professionalism one means responsibility for one's product (children), and control of the process of work, then fine. That would be synonymous with democracy. In that sense of the word, the auto worker's demand to control the speed of the production line, and incidentally affect the quality of *their* product, should be easily understood by teachers.

But in non-democratically structured schools, so-called professionalism is often an instrument of exploitation, not liberation.

But the miniscule AFT, without a single CB contract, and as much a political sect and debating society as it was union, was however able to respond to the new situation. The strategy was obvious, and it was seized with both hands: collective bargaining for teachers; take the right to strike even in defiance of the law; an alliance with the resurgent civil rights movement in the cities.

These all came naturally to the AFT. For it must not be forgotten that in 1956 the AFT expelled almost its entire southern membership, 8000 strong, for refusing to integrate their locals.

As a result, the AFT membership rose from 40,000 to 225,000 during the 1960's, and in a series of stunning collective bargaining elections, AFT took almost every major city in the country away from NEA.

But the growth of teacher unionism did not follow a straight line into the AFT alone.

The rapidly changing national and teacher climate, accompanied by the NEA administrative staff's need for survival, generated a vast change within NEA forcing it to move toward unionism. As a result, today, the differences between NEA and AFT are distinctly secondary—the differences between two unions within a common jurisdiction—so that merger is on the order of the day.

The events of this period bear two vital lessons for teachers:

(1) The Importance of Program. The fact that the AFT succeeded in its goals (the change in NEA was one of AFT's major successes) was a function of the fact that the AFT had a program to meet the needs of the time. Size is not synonymous with strength. Without the right kind of program, a huge organization can be as powerless in the face of events as was the dinosaur in the face of its changing environment. A merged organization which depends for power upon its size, not new ideas to meet new situations will be a bust.

The NY State merger is just the most recent confirmation of this fact. Witness New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) failure to get increased state-aid, its failure to beat off the attack on pensions; or to budge the anti-strike law.

(2) The insurgent teacher movement owed much of its vitality *and* its success to its embrace of the progressive social movements of the day. The rising civil rights movement provided enormous moral and physical muscle to the movement for changing education. It supported teacher unionism, and was in turn closely supported by it. Because at that time the AFT understood these things, we were able not only to radically reshape the entire teacher movement, but, in doing so, were able for the first time in education history to defeat the educational establishment and force it to retreat.

But this power was not to last.

Today, the teacher movement is distinctly on the defensive. Why the sudden reversal? What can be done about it? These are the questions to which all teachers must address themselves.

WHERE'S THE MONEY?

A common first response to the crisis facing teachers today is to refer to the seeming scarcity of funds for education.

School financing is today dominated by two powerful forces.

One of these, the U.S. corporate establishment, citing inflation, the needs of the economy, etc., calls for what are in effect cut-backs in funding in the name of "no money."

This is at best a half-truth.

For it can not be forgotten that in fact, somehow, there is plenty of money for those aspects of education which the corporate elite and their political representatives consider important. Leaving aside the ready availability of funds for war, or for subsidies to industrial and agricultural corporations, we must face the fact that Congress annually votes billions of dollars for vocational education and for colleges.

The reason is self-evident. Vocational and technical schools produce a skilled workforce for the corporations. The money spent there is in a sense an indirect subsidy to the corporations. Similarly, the colleges produce the professionals, technicians and managers needed for staffing and for increasing the efficiency of production. The corporations need these schools so badly that in 1968-69 alone, they contributed \$255 million to private colleges.

Not surprisingly, federal allocations for such schools are *increasing* while other education funds are being cut. Between 1968 and 1972, Federal funds for higher education and vocational schools almost doubled, while federal fund for the public schools rose by 5% in '72 and even fell slightly in 1973. Inflation makes this last figure even worse. (see "Digest of Education Statistics," 1972)

The corporate interest in curtailing *public school funding* has two major roots. First, the long-time Establishment opposition to free public schools for "lower class" children. School for such children were bitterly opposed from the very start—the demand for free public schools first raised by the trade union movement of N.Y. in 1829. At best, teaching the 3-R's was good enough. All else is waste since it does not have any profit-generating capacity.

It took massive efforts by labor organizations and middle class reformers such as Horace Mann and, after the Civil War, former abolitionists, to win free universal public education. The attacks upon this victory have been unceasing. Today, the Carnegie Commission for Higher Education continues this opposition by calling for increased tuition in the state colleges where the less affluent and working class students enroll.

There is however a second, more immediate reason for this anti-teacher, anti-education drive, and this is the well-known fact that the U.S. economy is going thru a crisis in which it is attempting to increase efficiency of production by lowering costs to "meet foreign competition." Foreign industrial countries increase efficiency by a high rate of capital investment. (Their one-time "low-wage advantage" has been disappearing because foreign wages are rising much more rapidly than U.S. wages.) But this high capital investment option is less open to U.S. business today because of the huge arms budget (which is incidently also a source of the shortage of refineries and our "energy crisis"). As a result, U.S. corporations have launched a vast speed-up campaign in the factories. That is why most union contracts being signed today include clauses extending management rights to speed-up production (in steel, rubber, auto, rail, teamsters and many others.) in exchange for 7% wage increases. This is a development which neither the press nor the union leadership is anxious to discuss publicly.

This vigorous "productivity" drive is being extended to public employment as well. This is because cutting public employment costs is actually an indirect way of cutting overhead costs to industry. For it is industry's goods, revenues, and wages which are after all the ultimate source of the taxes which pay for schools and government services. These taxes are then in a real sense part of the cost of production. *Cuts in costs of government* (schools) thus contribute to the general drive to U.S. industry for more "efficiency" and more profit.

That is why, on a national scale, corporation fronts such as the Committee for Economic Development, through their thousand sources of influence, encourage "holding the line" for all public services and salaries. As a result, the public schools, and other urban services are increasingly starved, and public employee incomes are falling farther and farther behind those of private industry, i.e., returning to their status of a generation ago.

There is however a trend *counter* to that of the corporate Establishment on the issue of school finance. The condition of the tax-weary small home owner whose children need schooling has generated increasingly strong pressures to shift the cost of the schools to State and national levels.

This tendency has been joined by an extremely important new ally arising from the Serrano case, in which it was charged that financing education via the local property tax inherently produced unequal education for the rich and poor. In the Fall of '73, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld such an opinion from the courts of New Jersey, and that state was directed to re-structure the financing of the school accordingly. There can be no question where teachers must stand on this issue.

INEVITABLY THIS MEANS PRESSURE FOR AN INCREASED SHARE OF SCHOOL FUNDING FROM STATE AND FEDERAL SOURCES—A PRESSURE WHICH WILL BE RESISTED BY THE CORPORATE ESTABLISHMENT. They prefer to keep public school funding on the local level. Local taxes are more regressive; they permit wealthier districts to provide better schools for the well-to-do; they provide an outlet (against teachers) for the anger of tax-weary citizens.

We are then faced with a new situation. Getting funds for schools at a time when (1) the Establishment is trying to restrict funds, and, (2) when funding must shift from the locality to state and national sources.

This new situation will require new tactics and strategies. Success in devising these strategies and in attaining our goals will be the yardstick for judging the merits of our union's leadership.

SHANKER AND THE AFT

To speak of leadership in AFT today, is to speak of Albert Shanker, the real leader of AFT in fact, if not yet in name.

As for David Selden, the lack of any real outcry from the ranks of the union at Shanker's brutal demand for Selden's resignation speaks volumes. It is not Selden's lack of energy or other personal flaw which has kept him in the background in AFT, without any independent base, and has led him to give-in to Shanker on innumerable occasions.

The source of Selden's weakness relative to Shanker lies in the fact that the differences between them are essentially nuanial.¹

True, Selden backed McGovern when Shanker gave Nixon a back-door endorsement. True, Selden turned against the war in Viet-nam and became, as he said, "a mild dove", while the hawk Shanker to this day bitterly opposes even the U.S. detente with the USSR and China.

¹Secondary, but nonetheless important in the split between them is the fact that Shanker and Selden were on opposite sides when the Socialist Party split this year. Shanker sided with Meany's favorite, Bayard Rustin, leader of the now-defunct Socialist Party and also head of the conservative H. Philip Randolph Institute. Selden joined Mike Harrington in leaving the S.P.

But when it comes to the *gut issues* concerning the teachers union there are no discernable differences between Selden and the Shanker-Meany team.

Neither has any solution to the fact that teachers salaries and employment are falling faster than any other part of the organized work force. *Both* supported the wage-freeze which has hurt teachers more than most others. *Both* do little more than make the record against binding arbitration for public employees; *both* are silent about Meany's advocacy, and McGovern's votes in favor of it. Both advocate merger as way to more effectively convert the union into a basically political lobby. *Both* believe that the chief method of reversing the attacks on teachers is by making deals with the politicians.

The Liberal Selden thus represents the ideological bankruptcy of "liberalism" among labor leaders. As a group, Woodcock of the UAW, and Wurf of AFSCME, et al, they have no solutions to the real problems facing Labor and therefore have difficulty differentiating themselves from Meany, or putting up any fight against him.

The unfortunate aspect of power struggle between Selden and Shanker is not that Shanker has decreed "Selden must go", but that the ranks of the teachers do not yet understand that both Shanker and Selden must go if teachers are to resolve the grievous problems they face today.

Today Shanker is recognized as the leader of AFT by virtue of the fact that he is the most articulate, most sophisticated, most perceptive of all AFT leaders. All others including even Herrick Roth and Bill Simons differ from him only in secondary features and in less awareness of their roles. Their future is mirrored in Shanker.

For all these reasons, Shanker has increasingly set the tone and strategy for all teacher unionism today, including the NEA.

WHAT THEN IS SHANKER'S STRATEGY FOR THE NEW SITUATION WE FACE?

ARE STRIKES OBSOLETE?

"because there is a difference between democracy in which votes ultimately rule—and the people—and this sort of thing, (state-wide or national strikes, —ed.) which is not a democracy, because if teachers could go out and force the elected representatives of all the people into this sort of position, then doctors could do the same thing against an inadequate medical program in this country; and every other group could decide to withdraw their services on a national basis in order

to bring about a legislative change. What we would have would not be democracy but a kind of Fascism by force, and I oppose it very much.”

Al Shanker, 1973 AFT convention (stenographic copy)

The need for new strategies today applies to so basic a question as strikes.

In a period when industrial strikes are at a 10 year low, teacher strikes are increasing in number, intensity and duration.

Furthermore, the failure of the State and Federal gov't. to provide funds (our union's failure in this area is sadly all too obvious), means that these local strikes have increasingly severe limitations. These strikes can win defensive battles up to a point. But when it comes to advances, real victories as in the past—more jobs, increased teacher rights in the schools, beating inflation, etc.—then local strikes have not brought great advances as, again, witness our declining absolute and relative salaries, rising unemployment and teacher insecurity.

In fact, in places like NY state, with its 2-day fine for each day out, school boards can even *make* money on a local strike. The situation in general is one of creeping attrition of teacher power.

If we are to wage winning battles, not just rear-guard actions, then clearly local strikes, while necessary, may be insufficient. Tactics such as strikes directed at the States and even Federal gov't will prove absolutely essential if the tide of anti-teacher, anti-school economics is to be reversed.

And yet, Shanker and the AFT leadership have adamantly refused to even consider such a policy. In fact, official AFT policy is anti-state-wide strikes.

Shanker's rationale for this position was expressed at the 1973 AFT convention in speaking against a proposal to explore the idea of state-wide and antional strikes. (see quote above) The logic of this position is not only unbelievably faulty, but has vast implications.

To start with, Shanker's analysis applies with equal validity to a strike against a city-council which also consists of "elected representatives of all the people", and even to strikes against an elected school board. Are we also to reject such strikes as anti-democratic, "Fascist force"?

If not, then what makes a strike against a reactionary legislature or even a national Congress any less honorable or democratic, not to speak of "fascist"?

Shanker's reasoning suffers from a second even more fundamental error. It assumes that legislatures actually do, in practice, truly repre-

sent us all. It accepts fiction for fact. Such "truths" belong at best in a civics class, and not in a good one at that. The reality is that the Establishment—the corporations, banks, and their political agents—dominate the political process in a thousand direct and indirect ways, despite the fact that they have few votes at the ballot box.

If this is the *real* situation, then the application of maximum force to a state legislature to make it "do-right" by one million NY state public employees is an exercise in true democracy not fascism.¹ Is Shanker's tie to the status quo so great that he can not see this?

Further, Shanker's objections to state-wide and national strikes obviously apply with equal force to the threatened general strike in support of Phila's striking teachers in 1972. Yet it was that threat which saved the Phila. teachers. Are they any more weapons Shanker would have us discard?

As for the Phila. strike itself, contrary to Shanker's story, his friends Meany and Usery (mediator of the strike, and *today* AFL-CIO director of organization] intervened in that strike *primarily out fear and hostility to the general strike threat*. Usery himself admitted as much in a speech after the strike was settled.

"We came dangerously close this year to a test of the effectiveness of the general strike as a weapon in the United States.

"It happened in Philadelphia. I was there. Unions committed themselves to a general walkout in support of the striking teachers.

"There had been a great deal of speculation as to whether the unions could have made good their strike threat. That, to me, is like speculating on whether the robber with a gun in your belly will really have the nerve to pull the trigger.

"There is no doubt in my mind that if the union movement had succeeded, there would have been great pressures to do it again—and again—and again. And there is even less doubt in my mind that had the general strike test failed, the union movement would have worked deliberately to see that it never failed again.

"So I am determined to do all that is possible, now, to put the general strike idea to rest in America—in peace and forever."

¹In Europe, school funding is all but entirely Federal, so that teachers strikes also tend to be nation-wide. Have these strikes too had "fascist" consequences?

Shanker & Usery to the contrary, the need today is for the teachers movement to begin to consider escalated strikes which transcend a single local—county-wide, state-wide and national strikes which correspond to the changing situation we face.

But can such strikes succeed? Why not? It is hardly more than a decade since the same question was asked of ANY teachers' strike. The success of the San Francisco public employee general strike in 1970, and last year's successful strike of all 200,000 public employees in Quebec province (not to speak of Philadelphia) all suggest that state-wide strikes and other mass actions by teachers are both in the cards, and capable of real victories.

Only last Dec. 18 (1973), when an anti-teacher strike law was proposed in Ontario, Canada, a one-day strike by all 105,000 teachers, and a 30,000 strong march on the Legislature, compelled the tabling of the law.

The potential for such actions is in fact a central advantage of the proposed AFT/NEA merger. Without such actions, the merger will, as it has in NY, prove utterly incapable of meeting teacher needs today.

BINDING ARBITRATION

Shanker's rejection of state-wide or national strikes on the ground that they violate the rights of the "elected representatives of all the people" has a further corollary—it leads *logically* to the adoption of a policy of arbitration of contracts (not just grievances) to replace even local strikes.

This is not only logical, but is in full accord with the policies of Shanker's mentor, George Meany. Meany has repeatedly proposed full collective bargaining rights for all federal employees, with one slight exception, the substitution of binding arbitration for the right to strike. (see Meany speech to Nixon's Federal Labor Relations Council, Oct. 17, 1970) Shanker has never protested or dissociated himself from Meany's proposals, despite their obvious significance for all public employees.

Already, in fact, this concept of integrating binding arbitration into the right-to-bargain laws, is spreading throughout the country. (Minnesota, Washington). It has been proposed in NY, and the NEA/AFSCME coalition has proposed it to Congress.

But why not try it? What is wrong with binding arbitration of contracts?

First, observe the results. During the 1972-73 school year, arbitrators, nationally, have been giving awards of about 3.5% (5% in metropolitan NY). That is, they have chosen to award even less than the wage freeze guidelines, even though every major union which has settled on

its own settled for considerably more. In effect then arbitration becomes a formula for attrition of teacher standards relative to other groups in the economy.

Unfortunately, the arbitration concept has gained some unwarranted favorable publicity from those few cases in which a school board has refused to accept even the arbitrators modest recommendations. This is because some school boards prefer the club to the stiletto—they prefer to try to push teachers all the way back, overnight, not the more gradual, more politic methods of the arbitrator.

Secondly, arbitrators in school contract disputes tend to refuse to rule on anything but money, and either kill the rest or send it back to negotiations. This creates a powerful impetus to settle, with nothing but monetary gains, if any. The spreading tendency to limit bargaining to salary and nothing else (Penna., Indiana) is certain to intensify this behaviour by arbitrators.

Lastly, the case for arbitration of contracts rests upon the fictitious assumption that arbitrators are actually neutral, objective, impartial. In reality, the weight of the Establishment, of the corporations, and even of school boards in all these quasi-official processes (whether performed by AAA or state mediation officers), far exceeds the weight of unions, especially weak unions such as those of public employees.

One has only to recall Ralph Nader's voluminous evidence that Federal and other so-called "independent", "neutral", and even "pro-consumer" commissions are de facto agencies of the corporations they are supposed to be regulating in an impartial way.

Arbitration is then, in short a sophisticated way to guarantee a gradual erosion of teacher gains. For our union to adopt it would be an act of desperation and weakness.

It is the light of Shanker's logically implicit receptivity toward binding arbitration, that many other puzzling phenomena become clear, such as: his refusal to wage any kind of *fight* against the Taylor law in NY; his refusal to consider raising a strike fund to combat the two-day fines for each day of strike penalty; and of course, the AFT's silence in the face of Meany's pro-arbitration pronouncements

Recently, the NEA has gotten into the collective bargaining act (in collaboration with AFSCME). A law sponsored by them, the Clay-Perkins Bill, is now in the Congressional hopper, bearing what NEA doubtless considers a clever bargaining gimmick—if any public employee union (state, local or federal) requests binding arbitration, then the employing unit must accept. Failure to accept gives the union the strike option.

This proposal too suffers from some basic and obvious defects:

(1) the proposal itself is of course negotiable. What if the Congress adds a similar clause giving governmental units (the employer) the same rights to demand Binding Arbitration? (This is precisely what happened to a similar NEA sponsored bill in Minnesota). Would NEA accept it? You bet! And, unfortunately, so would the AFT, in all probability.

(2) with such a clause in the law, the pressure from all sides to make the union "ask" for arbitration becomes enormous. ("you have an alternative"!)

(3) should a strike occur, the easy way out for the board would be (as in Detroit, in Oct. '73) to propose binding arbitration. Again, that would be hard for the union to refuse, since the strike would have resulted from the board's refusal to accept the arbitration in the first place.

As a result, the NEA law is just a hair short of compulsory binding arbitration of all contracts.¹

Binding arbitration is just one means by which the Establishment hopes to erode teacher militancy. It is part of a larger strategy embodied in the rash of new laws governing public employee bargaining.

To start with, these laws are response to the persistence of teacher strikes which have caused all but neanderthals such a Reagan to begin to abandon the *overt* anti-bargaining tactic. But the intent of these laws is quite another thing. The Establishment feels that such laws can head off *militant* unions by encouraging the recognition of *conservative* organizations. The first law with this intent was passed in N.Y. State in 1968, the Taylor Law. It succeeded in its purpose. First the state public employee union was decimated and its collective bargaining rights arbitrarily given to a company union in Governor Rockefeller's pocket. As for the AFT, its growth came to an abrupt halt in N.Y. once NEA locals could bargain and sign contracts.

The NEA and CTA clearly hoped to repeat this experience recently in California. There, the collective bargaining bill recently vetoed by Reagan would have resulted in the Association being the bargaining agent in all but a few districts. Furthermore, this bill and others would have granted collective bargaining but with such severe limitations on the power of strike that it would have practically guaranteed court imposed settlements on teachers.

¹A system of mutual binding arbitration has been in operation in Australia for years, for all unions, public and private. The law was originally passed with the approval of the Australian labor movement. But the actual experience with the law has been so negative that a fierce campaign is now on to abolish the law, by eliminating all penalties for failure to conform.

So what at first blush appears, abstractly, as a major victory for teacher unionism can be, under some circumstances, a back-door attack upon the possibility of *militant* unionism. Under some conditions, in fact, "no law" can even be better than a bad law. For if the AFT and NEA—whether or not they merge—move to a position of relying essentially upon political lobbying to attain our goals, then the passage of laws such as the federal Clay-Perkins bill is the cheapest way out for the Establishment (especially if such laws contain arbitration provisos, and place limits upon what is negotiable—as in Penna. and Indiana.)

But this tack is fraught with risks for the Establishment. For such laws *can* have consequences other than those intended. In California, for example, given the intense competition of the AFT and NEA state organizations, and the heavy salary losses over the past few years, the result *could* be the opening of the floodgates to teacher action—strikes, local mergers, etc. For teachers support those laws for reasons quite different from the reasons of the paid officials of the two competing organizations.

POLITICAL ACTION: THE LEGISLATIVE GAME

There is still another inevitable conclusion which follows Shanker's rejection of strikes against "the elected representatives of the people". If Shanker is correct then it follows that the only strategy remaining to democrats and to any union of public employees is one limited to the legislative game.

"The basic process . . . must be solved thru the political process—by electing a responsive legislature and city government which will assure that our schools have funds", says Shanker.

The full meaning of this statement only becomes clear when one realizes that it was made by Shanker as an argument against a parent-led boycott of the schools in Harlem in 1972 for additional teachers. That is Shanker was actually *counterposing* political action to boycott or strike action.

No teacher can reject political action per se. But if political action replaces or substitutes for direct action, for state-wide or other strikes against our near de-facto employer—the state legislature which votes the funds—then it is doomed to defeat. For the "success" of such political action is based upon the questionable premise that the legislative bodies truly represent the interests of the people, not the Establishment.

In fact, the labor movement, and indeed every popular movement, *which was serious about its goals*, have instinctively known that re-

liance upon a pure government lobbying strategy, for attaining its goals is a deadend policy.

That is why neither the right-to-strike, nor civil rights, nor women's right-to-vote, nor any other great social movement has ever achieved its ends by Shanker's kind of political action. They always recognized clearly—it was the *pre-condition of success*—that only mass movements which dare, when necessary, to take to the streets have ever won their cause.

Closer to home, no teacher should ever forget our own AFT/V.P. Ryan's report to the 1971 AFT convention, in which he regretfully had to admit that the liberal senators, our "friends" who gladly accept teacher support, and money at election time, refused to vote general aid funds to the public schools, because "the money would only end up in teachers' pockets". So it is not all Nixon's fault. The fact is, not one congress, however liberal has ever voted one cent for *general aid* to the public schools (money which could be applied to salaries, buildings, etc.)

LASTLY, NO ONE DARE FORGET THE MOST RECENT AND DEVASTATING PROOF OF THE DEAD-END OF TWO-PARTY POLITICS—Shanker and Meany's back-door endorsement of Nixon in 1972.

But this assessment of Shanker's form of political action must not be construed as opposition to political action per se. For successful mass action, especially for public employees who can not stop the wheels of industry, is greatly strengthened if it carries with it the support of the general public—i.e., the vast majority of working people. A political party, whose major task is mobilizing all working people, organized and unorganized, women, minorities, etc., for mutual support and to organize the fight against the ruling corporate Establishment is indispensable for our purposes.

To suppose however that the Democratic Party is, or can become that instrument flies in the face of both experience and theory. Buying a "partial interest" in one or another candidate, or in the party as a whole, will be as ineffective as the proposal that workers buy enough shares of General Motors to control it.

A case in point is the virtual take-over of the Michigan Democratic Party by the UAW since the late 1940's. (In Wayne County, Detroit, 70% of the party leaders and functionaries are union members, mostly UAW.) This process, and its consequences are described in Labor in American Politics, by David Greenstone.

The experience provides us with a classic case of cooptation. The result of the take-over was *not* to make the Democratic Party and the State serve the ends of labor and its allies, but quite the opposite. Greenstone describes how the UAW-controlled Democratic Party

actually agreed to a sales tax, to the elimination of business taxes, to a near-regressive state income tax; etc.—all policies it opposed in theory. As for teacher right to strike—that remains illegal in Michigan.

It is not just past history, but even our own union's recent experience which leads directly to this conclusion.

In 1970, the N.Y. teachers unions and the state AFLCIO, supported Rockefeller for governor, overtly or covertly. The "reward" for this support was a rash of anti-teacher bills, backed by the governor: 5-year tenure; sabbatical leave moratorium (and their de facto elimination in many districts); a bill limiting bargaining to salary issues.

Last year, 1972 the N.Y. State United Teachers (NYSUT) repeated this brilliant tactic. In fact, NEA/AFT/NYSUT all crowed about the fact that nationally, 77% of all candidates to state and local office, in 43 states, were elected with official teacher endorsement and support. (N.Y. Teacher, Nov. 26, '72)

It was expensive too. In N.Y. State alone, teachers organizations contributed over \$600,000. Nationally, teacher organizations contributed \$3,000,000 compared to \$7,000,000 contributed by the entire AFLCIO. Properly used, this represents real potential power.

But what was the result, in practice, of this great expenditure? What happened to the political clout it was supposed to bring us? In N.Y., Rockefeller inspired and initiated an anti-teacher pension law, (currently being imitated in Michigan). In other states laws limiting bargaining to salaries are being passed. Elsewhere (Minnesota), defacto binding arbitration has been imposed.

In one sense this version of political action is a barely disguised regression to the old pre-strike days, when associations spurned strike action, and relied instead upon "political influence", lobbying and the like.

It is the pursuit of this fatal policy by Shanker and the NEA which is responsible for the fact that no real fight against the Taylor law has been waged (not even in the legislature), and for our recent cuts in pensions, worsened tenure law, and more to come.

For with Shanker's strategy, he had to, and did, reject all proposals for bringing the true potential weight of the union's 200,000 members in N.Y. to bear on these matters. For example, he refused to consider a mass march on Albany by all public employee unions, in opposition to the pension law.

Dependence upon politicians is not how we teachers won our rights in the past, and it will not be so in the future. It is in fact a strategy for defeat.

Shanker's second response to the defeat was to claim as a victory the fact that under the new law teachers are to be treated as a separate unit (as indeed they always had been) and not mixed up with the 700,000 public employees in the state, i.e., he is laying the ground for continuing his go-it-alone policy despite its failure.

Shanker further justifies his "independent" course by pointing to the union's vast "political clout". His associate, Tom Hobart, President of NYSUT, went so far as to claim that, due to this clout, the union had in fact won a victory on pensions, since "we did not lose as much as we expected". For such wisdom and leadership he is paid \$40,000 per annum.

Taylor Law: The union's fabled political clout has done no better in fighting N.Y. state's Taylor law, the worst anti-strike law in the nation (two-days fine for each day of strike and, the fine money goes into the Board of Education's coffers.)

Teachers have been fighting anti-strike laws in N.Y. for 25 years, unsuccessfully. But Shanker still refuses to make any effort to organize a coalition of unions to make a real fight, despite the law's devastating effect upon teacher readiness to strike.¹

As if to compound the error, the UFT has launched a raid against another AFLCIO public employee union, AFSCME, which represents teacher aids and monitors (not the paraprofessionals) in the schools.

So on Sundays, Shanker deplores the Teamsters union raid on Cesar Chavez's Farmworkers union, while on week-days, the UFT does the same thing, to a potential ally.

THERE IS STILL ANOTHER FORM OF LABOR COALITION which is being experimented with in several California school districts. This is an attempt to agree on joint negotiating strategy with other school district unions in civil service, etc., and, in the case of city districts, with city employee unions. In such cases, and they will be increasing in number, teachers have to be aware of the danger of appearing to seek gains at the expense of other public employee salaries, of their jobs. Such cut-throat indifference may appear "realistic", but it can only harm the chances of success even in the short run.

"But", we are told, "Shanker does advocate coalitions". He calls for state and national coalitions *for school funding*, composed of teachers, school boards, administrators, and, the labor movement and minority groups.

¹Shanker refuses to even ask the N.Y. State AFL-CIO to make a fight against the anti-strike law, because (1) the state AFL-CIO is split. Half of it, led by Shanker's penalties. (2) Shanker is increasingly committed to the "political road", lobbying, electioneering, etc. as THE solution to teacher problems.

It won't wash. For on the national level such organizations already exist, or have been regularly convened. Their effect has been minimal. (At the same time, the quiet lobbies of the corporations have won billions of *their* educational purposes, and, even the black movement was able, during the 60's, when it was on the streets, to win funds for its educational goals—token as these were.)

ONCE AGAIN, AS IN THE CASE OF "MERGER", ITS NOT JUST NUMBERS [COALITIONS] THAT COUNT. ITS WHAT WE ARE PREPARED TO DO WITH THOSE NUMBERS.

TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY

The victory of the union, especially in the cities in the 1960's, was in considerable part due to a close alliance with the civil rights movement emerging from a near-century of relative quiescence.

With black and spanish-speaking children a majroity, or near-majority in most big cities, this alliance becomes more necessary than ever, to help restore a teaching climate in city schools, and to strengthen an action-alliance for more funds for the schools.

The sad, but instructive history of the 70-day Newark Teachers Strike in 1971 demonstrates the consequences of failure to build such an alliance in the large cities.

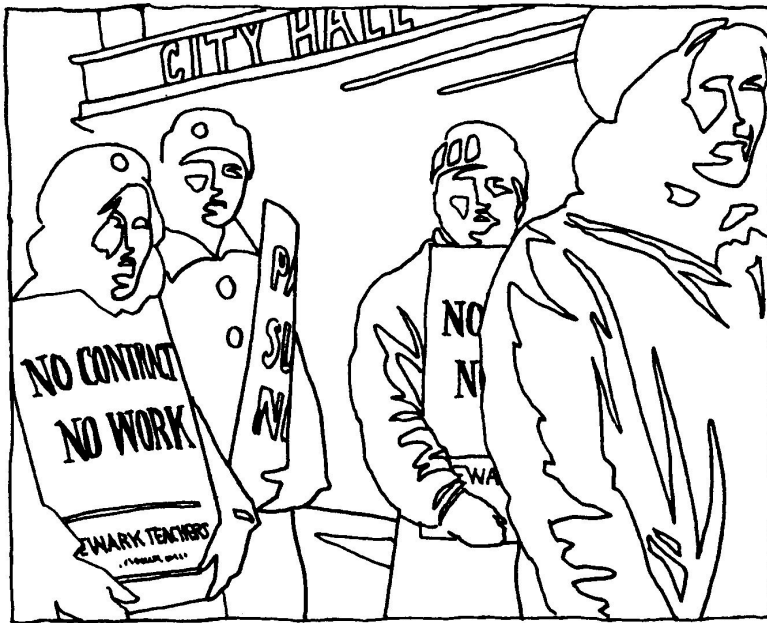
The NTU is led by a courageous black militant, Carole Graves. She leads a local of predominantly white teachers in a community with a black majority.

Nevertheless, the NTU pursued the conventional, parochial, policies of most teacher unions, and in practice ignored the community needs and aspirations. In doing so, the NTU failed to see *that in an increasingly black city*, such a policy is the road to disaster. The lesson was not long in coming.

In short order, the teachers union was outflanked within the black community by an anti-union demagogue, Imamau Baraka, who succeeded in alienating most of the black community from the union by pointing to the seeming indifference of the "white" union to the needs of black children, and blaming the teachers for the decaying schools.

As a result, the union was isolated, and forced into a strike in 1971. After ten weeks, the union was preserved, but barely. It survived, but was no longer able to seize the initiative in anything.

When one adds to this the national AFT's constant political and financial undercutting of the NTU leadership, for factional purposes, the NTU is indeed left in desperate straits.



The situation was similar in Phila's 50-day strike. Here the strike busting effort by ex-cop Mayor Rizzo (elected with Labor's support) was encouraged by what was, at the start, Rizzo's belief that the community, black & white, was hostile to the PFT. He had good reason to think so, since the local had been notoriously indifferent and even hostile to the black community (half of the student body).

It took a threatened general strike by Labor, and a dramatic public reversal by the black community leaders toward the end of the strike, to bring Rizzo to the bargaining table. Even so, the gains for the teachers were very meager.

In Highland Park, Michigan, community outrage at the teacher strike resulted in hundreds of black parents forcibly locking in teachers and board negotiators, and refusing to allow them to leave until some agreement was reached. They succeeded. . . . to the union's detriment.

If there is a lesson from these strikes, it is that a teachers union, especially in the big cities, is fighting with one hand tied if it has not, through patient work, forged an alliance with community groups for common action around common needs, against the school boards and state legislatures.

Instead, the actual trend within AFT is in the opposite direction. Like most unions, the AFT has retreated (except rhetorically) to a stance of indifference which, in some places comes close to hostility.¹ And community groups often reciprocate.

It was not always so.

At one time, in the 1930's a very powerful alliance of the unions and the black movement existed. An alliance so well-grounded that in the '30s the CIO was one of the most popular organization in the ghettos because of its demonstrated, implacable hostility to racism and its organization of hundreds of thousands of blacks into the unions, as equals, for the first time in American history.

As a result, the CIO was able to create a climate which put an end to the use of blacks as scabs for strikes (a common practice in the 1920's).

But in recent years this relationship has gravely deteriorated. The reasons are not difficult to locate.

The black movement was repelled by the AFL-CIO's refusal to support Martin Luther King's "March on Washington" in 1963; the continued discrimination in some unions, especially construction unions (where only 1% of the "skilled" jobs are held by black people), led to damaging confrontations in the late '60's and, perhaps most important, the failure of the labor movement to organize unions in the South, or to wage a real fight for jobs and housing for blacks (who are, in the best years, at least 10% unemployed—30% among those under 25 years).

That all this is *not* ancient history was demonstrated recently, by Shanker and Meany's praise for the appointment of the racist construction union leader, Peter Brennan, as Sec'y of Labor—until he betrayed Meany as well by approving exemptions to the minimum wage law for youths.

If one adds to these factors the disappointment of blacks with the lack of progress in the schools, then one can not be surprised that these legitimate grievances have led some black organizations to opt for dead-end, separatist and other non-solutions to their problems. Some blacks responded to Labor's indifference by seeking other "allies". In Newark, it was the Prudential Life Insurance Co., the most powerful corporation in Newark. In N.Y., it was with the Ford Foundation. Such allies inevitably tended to turn the movement to the political "right".

In education, this turn took the form of blaming teachers for the schools, when in fact teachers, who do *not* run the schools, are also victims of those same schools. This attitude also led to a refusal to see that no progressive change in education could be effected unless it was by the agreement of the community *with the teachers who have to implement it*. Nothing else is realistic, or even democratic.

On the other hand, teachers have failed to see that real teacher power, more democratic schools, and community rights are not only consistent, but interdependent. Only together can the educational establishment be defeated.

THE '68 STRIKE IN N.Y.C.

In N.Y.C. the failure of both parties to understand this relation between teacher power and community rights (though the larger responsibility lies with the powerful, established, Labor movement), resulted in the '68 strike by N.Y.C. teachers—a trap for both the union and the black people.

The strike was, in a short-term sense, a "success". The union crushed its opponent, or thought it had. And in the following year the UFT won a contract whose financial terms are still unmatched.

But the strike had other consequences whose long-run effects suggest that the strike may have been a pyrrhic victory. For the strikes exacerbation of racism and the break with the black movement, (the moral and physical spearhead of educational change in the '60s), intensified the growing alienation of teachers from community—an alienation which is expressed in a growing sense of non-accomplishment, demoralization, and growing fear of the community—a fear which in the cities can easily take on racist form.

As a result, first in N.Y., later elsewhere, a current of teacher provincialism and a self-isolation reared its head. Gone was the practical idealism of the earlier period which had been so productive. It was replaced by a mood of resignation which, bravado aside, could not conceal the growing teacher awareness of our isolation and weakness in the face of the mounting problems.

The only "practical" course left seemed to be in-grown, stick-togetherness against all forces and a desperate search for new allies. As in the case of the black movement's "allies", our union's new allies also tended toward the political right. And their price was the soul of the union.

In N.Y.C. Shanker formed alliances: pro-parochial school-aid forces,¹ anti-integration forces, and with the Principals' Association against the so-called common enemy, the community, especially its non-white sectors.

The price? Surrender of the UFT's historic commitment to democratic schools—schools run by teachers working with parents and even older

¹In elections to the school board in district 26, in NYC, the UFT backed a slate of nine, eight of whom had children only in parochial schools, and were running on a platform of sharing with the parochial schools all federal grants to the district.

students, as opposed to schools run by a callous educational bureaucracy.

And not least, an alliance was formed with the most conservative elements within the Labor movement, with George Meany and all he represents.

These alliances have not strengthened the union, as the defeats and holding actions of recent years show. They have even impaired the union's capacity to meet the dangers of today, such as cuts in staff.

Thus, the 1972 UFT contract settled for a 5% raise in salary, with the clear understanding that the union would accept the cuts in staff (which have totaled over 10% over the past two years,—7000 jobs.) As a result, when the parents of East Harlem organized a pro-teacher school boycott AGAINST the cuts in staff, the UFT refused support.

The construction of an alliance of teachers, of all labor, with the community requires: (1) that the union be identified with active opposition *in deed* to racism in all its manifestations, in the schools, in the labor movement, and in society at large; (2) to overcome skepticism about teacher "concern", the union must also pursue a policy of aggressive support to whatever changes in the schools are necessary to meet the needs of working-class children, black and white.

(3) the union must support other progressive community needs as well such as:

(a) Vigorous opposition to sales taxes or small-homes tax as the financial for education.

(b) Support for integration of the schools.

(c) Jobs and Housing: Apart from the humanity of it, the absence of jobs for young blacks makes urban crime unbeatable. Convention resolutions and legislative lobbying have not and will not provide those jobs. AFT should press the AFLCIO to organize a massive movement for a guaranteed job for everyone wishing to work. This movement should be given forceful support.—marches, demonstrations, on-the-job actions, etc. (In Italy, despite the fact that the unions have hundreds of members of parliament, the entire labor movement still went on a two-day general strike to compel the government to provide jobs and housing in Italy's impoverished South.)

Without efforts such as these, the racial polarization which is a threat not just to the schools, but to the entire labor movement, can only intensify.

THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATIVE UNIONISM

The argument to this point leads to a nagging question. What happened to the AFT leaders of the '60's? How can Shanker, a reputed militant¹ and even a "socialist", oppose state-wide or national strikes; oppose action-coalitions of unions; mute the fight against the Taylor law or against binding arbitration; be suckered-in by the political establishment; and try to impose a monolithic regime in our union?

To find a solution to this puzzle, we must consider the nature of trade union leadership in our society.

For it is not just Shanker and the AFT who hold these views. These are the views of the leaders of the entire labor movement, and of the NEA as well.

For example: The leaders of U.S. labor not only criticized the *victorious* national postal strike of 1970 (a strike carried out *against* the orders of the postal union leaders)—they even advocate binding arbitration for *all* unions, including the private sector. In fact, the steel workers union has just signed a 3-year agreement (without membership approval) providing for binding arbitration of the *coming* contract, and waiving the right to strike.

SUCH VIEWS, SHARED BY MOST UNIONS, HAVE A COMMON ROOT, WHICH MUST BE GRASPED IF WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN AFT, ITS PAST, ITS FUTURE, AND THE ROLE OF SHANKER IN ALL THIS.

These root causes are: (1) the philosophy of business unionism. (2) conflicts of interest between union members and leaders; (3) the role of the union contract.

BUSINESS UNIONISM

The guiding philosophy of most union leaders is "business unionism". In brief, it says "Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg".—a "wise" union leadership will limit its goals (and the membership's) and avoid anything which might "endanger" the system.

Some prominent examples may make the point clear.

1) John L. Lewis, the founder of the CIO and long-time president of the Miners' union was for a time, widely admired and respected by the

¹Re: Shanker's reputation as a militant, it is not widely known that Shanker *opposed* both of the two strikes which really established the UFT, and won its first historic contract,—those of 1960 and '62. In both cases, the strikes occurred because the rank-and-file over-ruled the leadership, and were proven right.

rank and file as a leader of the labor movement. Nevertheless, he allowed his union to be cut from 500,000 miners to 150,000 in just over a decade by permitting and even encouraging automation of the mines as well as strip mining at the expense of miners' jobs, and, paying next to no attention to mine safety—a "management prerogative".

There was no "payoff".

Lewis simply accepted the seeming "necessities" of the system. At no time did he make any demands for retraining of miners; no demands that the soaring profits of automation be invested in jobs for the discharged miners, etc.

As a result, Appalachia's depressed state today is in large part Lewis's responsibility in that he had a powerful force to oppose the mine-owners, but refused to use it. Not out of indifference or malice, but because he was a prisoner of business unionism.

Similarly, when Roosevelt doublecrossed the steel union in the 1938 strike, all Lewis, as a supporter of the basic system could do was to switch to the Republicans.

2) The International Ladies Garment Workers Union—that bastion of liberalism, has consistently refused to support increased state minimum wage laws in N.Y., on the grounds that it would bankrupt parts of the garment industry.

3) As for the United Automobile Workers, under both Reuther and Woodcock the union surrendered contract clauses which had given workers some control over assembly line speed and the use of automatic equipment—clauses which had been won in often bloody strikes during the 1930's and 40's.

And in all these cases, the idea that unions might oppose corporate price gouging of the consumer is alien to the business unionist.

The behavior of these unions is the norm. They could be multiplied almost without end, and extend even to such supposedly tough unions as the Teamsters and Construction unions. Only space prevents detailing their capitulation to the interests of their employers.

The honest business unionist, as in the cases cited above, sees his job as a business—i.e., he is selling labor (his memberships' labor) at the highest price possible *within the limits of the marketplace*. He therefore believes it to be his/her responsibility not to disturb the market or the corporation too much for fear they will collapse. And if those *presumed* limits require cuts in pay or staff, or a no-strike clause, or speed-up, as in the cases above, then. . . . "realism" demands it must be done.¹

¹The business unionist "realistically" submits to the status quo (even those few who disapprove of it) because he identifies "reality" with the obvious, the immediate, the

The fact that, at times, many in the *ranks* of labor share these misconceptions of "common interest" with the employer only makes it easier for union leaders to follow the precepts of business unionism.

Of course there is a vast difference between the illusion about "common interest" in the ranks, and in those of the business unionist. The latter is firmly tied to business unionist conceptions by additional, personal material benefits. The high salaries (sometimes running to six figures), and expense accounts, not to speak of the opportunity for even "easier" money, inevitably separate the leader from the ranks. Such "rewards" consolidate and accelerate his identification with his new peers, the corporate executives, and drive him into an ever deeper and irrevocable commitment to business unionism.

As for the ranks, the membership, the harmful consequences of the policy of accommodation can and do at times produce resentment which threatens to boil over into actions (wildcat strikes, opposition slates, etc.) which reveal the hollowness of the "common interest" theory.

These acts constitute a potential danger to the leadership and its policies. This danger in turn tends to set into motion a series of further responses by the leaders, all tending to whittle away democracy in the union, such as: one-sided, one-party newspapers; obstacles which prevent the ranks from organizing (including strong arm methods); attempts to impose "receiverships" upon "dissident" locals; and even the refusal to allow members to vote on contracts, (proposed by Meany, and already in effect in some unions.)

The loss of union democracy in whole or part is therefore very largely an inevitable consequence of business unionism. It is not primarily the result of personality or the superficial theory that "power corrupts".

It follows that the fight for the preservation of union democracy is inseparable from the fight against business unionism. In the long run, neither effort can be successful without the other.

That is why the periodic rebellions leading to changes in the top leadership of unions in recent years (in steel, electrical, rubber, coal, oil, etc.) ended up changing very little of consequence.

The new leaders, even with the best of intentions, if they accept the philosophy and limits of the status quo, must quickly adopt the same basic policies of the displaced leaders. They are therefore driven just as

short-run. In doing so he tends to reject the very possibility of any real challenge to what exists at the moment, as if it were permanent, as if the first law of the universe were not "change", both evolutionary and revolutionary change.

quickly to revert to the undemocratic practices of their predecessors, for the same reasons—because the membership is *at times* forced to disregard the limits imposed by the system and strike out against speed-up, against automation, against the federal wage guidelines, against run-away shop, and against the plea of "no money", etc.

Through business unionism, the top labor leadership has become an actual prop to the system—a prop to which the corporation must give periodic concessions in order to keep the "irresponsible" membership off the leaders backs, provided that these concessions are no threat to the employers' basic dominance of the work-place, or the school. The whole method represents a classic example of cooptation by the employers.

It is only in this context that one can make sense of George Meany's, and Shankers policies. Thus it should not be surprising that Meany, speaking for all official labor advocated a system of wage-price controls before Nixon. Meany did this despite his own publicly acknowledged bad experience with controls in 1944 and 1953, and his admission that controls succeed only in cutting real wages while letting profits soar—as they are again today. (see his article in "American Federationist", Mar. '44). Nor can it be surprising that Meany remains on Nixon's boards, or that, when some unions, like the hospital workers, go on strike in defiance of the Board, he keeps total silence and gives no support. Nor ought it be surprising that Meany seeks binding arbitration as an alternative to strikes; or seeks to deny employees the right to vote on contracts, on the ground that "we expect the corporation negotiators to commit the company, then why should they not expect the same of our negotiators?"

This acceptance of the philosophy of business unionism is then the reason why not only Shanker and the AFT, but even the "unaffiliated" NEA end up in the same bind as other unions, and will continue to do so until they are prepared to be independent of the system.

THE CONTRACT—A Two-sided Affair

"...The school boards and teachers ought to develop a commission on fair play for overseeing some of these conflicts (between teachers and school boards.—Ed.). Certain types of actions in our conflicts are so unfair and destructive that they must stop. *If this means 'blowing the whistle' in our own ranks, then that's what we must do*".

Al Shanker,
(United Teacher, Nov. 4, 1973)

The concept of business unionism even has an effect upon the holy-of-holies, the union contract—how it is perceived, and enforced (or not enforced.).

The contract is an agreement which delineates a truce in the, lets face it, ongoing struggle for power between teachers and school boards (as between any union and the employers). This struggle takes the form of fighting for teacher rights, for justice, etc. all resisted by the Boards, as by all employers. The contract is then the compromise reached at a particular point in time and relative power. It represents a temporary, unstable equilibrium. Nothing is ever *finally* resolved in a contract.

So long as a union is without a contract, leaders and members interests may coincide.

But once a contract is signed, a business-union leadership develops a different attitude toward the contract than the members'—in fact a disparity of interest between the two arises. (*This disparity is qualitatively reduced if the union leadership remains at least part time in the classroom. Fortunately this is the norm in smaller Aft locals.*)

In this potential conflict, the membership, though at times only the most militant members, smarting under the "compromises" which litter and limit the contract, is constantly bumping up against those limits, resenting them, seeking ways to transcend them.

The top leadership, especially the full-time, professional leaders, tend to have a different interest. They have to enforce the contract, "justify" it, and are as a result often caught up between the members and the employer. The leaders' rationale for all this is that "if we don't respect the contract, they won't" or, its not "practical" to enforce the contract. As a result, they seek to be "reasonable" once a contract is won.

A classic example of the change that takes place in a business-union leader once he/she has "won" a contract, is that of Jerry Wurf, one-time militant, and still President of AFSCME.

"Up until now militancy has often been needed to deal with employers who would not listen, deal fairly, or allow their employees to peaceably organize. . . We are entering a new and different stage in the development of labor relations in the state and local governments. Our union is very aware of the new situation. . . We are responding to it by consciously moving from confrontation to cooperation. . . The experimental and revolutionary phase of public employee unionism is over. We now need to address ourselves to cooperatively bringing reasonableness into our relationship."

In recent months, Shanker has expressed similar views about the needs to end our "destructive warfare" with the school boards, (see his recent speech to the N.Y. School Boards Association quoted above.)

As a result of such thinking, in their attempts to cool things, the leadership will often even conceal the truth from the members.—They will hide defeats and exaggerate victories.

Examples of this process within AFT abound.

Thus the NYSUT newspaper refuses to publish the fact that in 1972, 33 N.Y. state locals signed contracts which surrendered "increment pay"; that several locals accepted merit pay; that sabbaticals were given up by many locals; that not a few announced salary settlements actually included increments, to exaggerate the gain, etc.

And in N.Y.C. mum's-the-word about the cuts in staff, or the fact that the contract is being daily violated in that half of all classes are larger than the contract maximum; or that the school board now determines class size by actual average attendance and not, as the contract stipulates, by the number of students on the register lists; or that a tenure teacher can receive an arbitrary U-rating and lose a year's increment and be transferred.

To speak of such things is politically embarrassing to the leadership. It distresses the membership. It calls for response, for action. Better to keep quiet about the retreats. Its easier on the leadership. Hence the silence about defeats, and even attempts to make them appear to be victories (as in the case of the N.Y. pension law cut-back, where "we lost less than we expected".)

But such a head-in-the-sand policy, while advantageous to the leaders in that it dilutes membership resentment and possible calls for action, has other consequences as well.

As the membership learns the true situation, sooner or later, it may react. And this tends to accelerate the tendency, already inherent in business union leadership, to introduce undemocratic practices and machine-politics into the union.

The conflict between most union leaders and members, which ends in union bureaucracy, therefore has a second objective basis. Both sides have different attitudes toward the contract and how to use it. It is not, essentially, a question of "bad guys", corruption, desire for prestige, or the desire to get out of the classroom, etc. These are common enough, but they are as much effects of the situation as they are the cause.

EVEN IN THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE. . . .

Conflicts between business union leaders and members can and do appear even in so elemental a matter as how to use the contract's grievance procedure.

This procedure is double-edged. It has negative as well as positive aspects. For if filing a grievance and using arbitration can help *protect* a contract, it can also be used by the Board to *erode* a contract.

Thus the Board may decide to openly violate a clause (especially if it is in the least bit ambiguous). This is done only partly as a "testing" operation. For if the union takes the grievance to arbitration, there is, on the average, at least a 50-50 chance of losing. In forcing an issue to arbitration then, the Board has nothing to lose. The arbitrator could rule in the board's favor, weakening the contract, or, at the very least, while the grievance is in process, (often as long as a year if arbitration is included), the Board's action is in effect. Thus the contract is at least temporarily negated, in practice. Justice delayed is justice denied.

To this double-edged character of the grievance clause, must be added that the fact that many teacher grievances are technically uncovered by the contract.

In the face of the two difficulties, the business union leader will prefer to say, "its not in the contract; nothing can be done", or if pressed, even use the grievance procedure to conceal inaction.

An alternative course of action does exist for those who recognize the limits of the contract and refuse to permit those limits to be used as a screen for doing nothing about injustices. That course is direct action on the job. Like any weapon, it is not for all seasons. Used judiciously, i.e., especially in the case of group grievances, or individual grievances which capture group interest and loyalty, it becomes possible to force the board to obey the contract. It is also possible to compel the board to behave fairly even in areas uncovered by the contract.

Such direct action can include: group refusal to perform extra-circular duties; voluntary duties, coaching duties, sick-outs, demonstrations, etc.

To a business unionist who sees "both sides" and who wants nothing more than to obey the contract, such a course of action is anathema. To members aroused at injustices and unwilling to be enmeshed in the at best ambivalent character of the grievance procedure, direct action is a necessary weapon even during the life of a contract.

LASTLY, it is the business union philosophy which is largely responsible for the parochial, provincial attitude of most labor leaders today. Content with lip-service and pious convention resolutions about other working people, real action in support of others is the exception not the norm.

A particularly painful and prominent recent example is the refusal of the railroad and teamsters unions to honor the Farah pants boycott. These 8,000 spanish-american garment workers have been on strike since early 1972. The plants are being operated by scabs. A simple

refusal by transport unions to move the scab-produced goods from the plants could win the strike in no-time. "But", we are told, "such an act would be illegal". Still, if teachers can go out on "illegal" strikes, when a principle is at stake, then why can't those more powerful unions do the same?

One must not infer from this analysis of business unionism that the bureaucratization of union's is inevitable or that all union locals and leaders are devoid of democratic give-and-take, or devotion to membership interests. This is far from the case. Democracy is very much alive in hundreds of AFT locals, as well as other unions. We point only to an inherent tendency which, even with the best-intentioned of leaders, undermines both union democracy and the ability to serve the real interests of the membership.

IN PLACE OF BUSINESS UNIONISM

In place of the philosophy of business unionism, we propose a philosophy of unionism whose basic premise is that the different classes in society, the working people, and the owners of industry, have essentially *conflicting* interests, not "common interests".

The theory of "common interest" conceals the heart of reality. Of course all people have a common interest in say, the elimination of contagious diseases. After all, bacteria only partially discriminate between the (healthier) rich and the poor. But what makes unions necessary, and what makes opposition political parties necessary is a fact which was obvious to the american Founding Fathers, to Madison, Jefferson and the rest, namely, that there are profoundly conflicting and even irreconcilable interests in society.

Madison would have known that what is good for General Motors is not necessarily good for the American people or for the auto workers. And teachers have begun to learn that our interests are radically different from those of the school boards despite the latter's attempt to use the concept of "professionalism" to conceal this fact.

Labor's interests are not the same as their employers; Labor's interests are best served when the interests of *all* working people is the concern of every union; it is in the interest of unions to expand democracy by pursuing the goal of Industrial Democracy. Socialists call this philosophy of unionism "class struggle unionism".

To the business unionist, as to the captain of industry, the owner invests his capital in a factory and therefore has the right to control it. To the class struggle unionist, the worker, the teacher, invests his or her *whole working life* in the job, and this gives *us* the right to determine the conditions under which we will spend that working life.

The ordinary business union contract, even when it is a good contract and is enforced, still leaves the employee in a factory or teacher in a school, subject to the orders of his supposed superiors. From the business unionist point of view that is how it should be, or at least *must* be. That is why powerful unions such as the UAW, Teamsters, construction, steel, sign contracts in which control of the conditions of work are left entirely in the hands of the employer.

On the other hand, the class struggle unionist acts on the belief that meaningful political democracy is impossible without economic democracy and therefore demands worker control of the work-place, including teacher control of the schools.

In the 1930's, the American labor movement started to move away from business unionism and toward class struggle unionism. This occurred in the massive upsurge of millions of workers which resulted in the formation of the CIO. This rebellion against the business union leaders of that day was waged under the banner of "Industrial unionism" (as opposed to craft unions), and originated the "sit-in" tactic which was later taken up by the civil rights movement. Together these new ideas began to reshape the entire labor movement.

This rank-and-file rebellion was aided by two forces—thousands of radicals and socialists (Walter Reuther was then one of them), and by a layer of the old business unionists led by John L. Lewis, head of the miners union. Lewis saw the need for industrial unions, but at the same time retained the basic premises of business unionism.

As a result of this half-way change, the shake-up in the unions was abortive, and the CIO unions regressed until today they are an integral part of the totally inadequate, conservative labor movement epitomized by George Meany.

The current impotence of unions (as in the early 30's) and the deep malaise about all the institutions of our society make it possible that, as in the past, working people will once again rise to the needs of the times and take up where they left off, i.e., complete the aborted change begun by those ranks who formed the CIO. But such a renewal can only be successful if we learn from the fate of the CIO that it is necessary to break decisively with business unionism and with the current breed of labor leaders who have that philosophy in their blood.

In turn this means that the proponents of class struggle unionism, must take the initiative in the organization of rank-and-file caucuses around that philosophy. These caucuses must come to exist in the locals, on the state and national levels in every union. And they must be imbued with the awareness that success will not come overnight, but will require girding for the long haul. Today, in several unions such

caucuses do exist, though all are in embryonic form. It AFT itself, the national United Action Caucus (UAC) and the N.Y. State Grassroots Caucus exist and function on a modest scale.

The UAC receives about 10% of the votes at national AFT conventions. It has a program which is *formally* in many respects similar to that proposed in this essay. But it often suffers from the serious weakness of not taking its own professed views seriously, and seldom fighting for them. Instead it tends to seize every opportunity to support any prominent business union leaders who comes along even if it means keeping quiet about the UAC's own philosophy and policies. A case in point was the endorsement of the conservative Meisen for AFT president in 1972. In addition, the UAC has no ongoing presence between conventions. It has no publication, and makes little effort to encourage or coordinate caucuses on the local level.

REGAINING THE INITIATIVE

Regaining the initiative which the teacher movement held during the '60's requires the adoption of policies which can restore teacher bargaining power, and give new directions to our union.

To start with, overcoming the limitations of isolated, local strikes can be accomplished in several ways:

- (1) State-wide and national direct action up to and including strikes if necessary to defend teacher interests. Merger, properly conceived, makes this tactic a real possibility.
- (2) A policy of action-coalitions with other public employee unions on local and state levels to defend common interests such as funding, pensions, anti-strike laws, etc.
- (3) Coalitions with community organizations.
- (4) Make the teachers union an "industrial" union of *all* school employees

But no man is an island. Neither is any one union, especially a public employee union.

AFT must therefore take the lead in organizing a movement within American unionism along lines such as the following:

1. opposition to all anti-strike and binding arbitration laws.
2. opposition to wage-controls—enforce real price controls through union action on the job, in the plants, and thru housewives committees in the market place.

But it also no accident that Dewey's victories, in practice, were more of form than substance.

For, at the same time, our society has also been molded by a second tradition—the bureaucratic, authoritarian ethos derived from capitalist society's dominant economic institution, the corporation. All modern American history is in one sense the result of the constant tension between these two competing thrusts in the spirit of our country.

The guiding principle of the corporations is not democratic participation, free exchange of ideas, etc., but quite the contrary, hierarchical rule from the top on down. These patterns of thought and mores are organic to a capitalist method of production. They are necessary to its survival. Moreover, these patterns largely govern the shape of all other institutions in American life. They even constitute an additional source of the tendency to bureaucracy in unions.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the culture of the corporation is in conflict with the aim of democratic schools—the free and full development of character and personality. Instead, the type of schools encouraged and needed by such a system are characterized by:

(1) *schools which produce what the market needs*—training, not education; not child-oriented schools, but schools which produce trained personnel in the quantity and character needed by the corporations, and “educated” to accept the values and mores of the status quo. Such schools are the natural consequence of a market-oriented society and of its values.

(2) *An organizationally bureaucratic school system*, in which the principal and board of education parallel the foremen and factory board of directors. Under this model, schools are to be ruled by principals who receive higher salaries because they have the greater(?) responsibility of administering and managing: making and enforcing teacher duty schedules, taking care of the building, ordering books, art supplies, etc. To a society geared to produce commodities, the value of such “management functions” far exceeds the responsibility of the teacher who is “only” educating the living child.

(3) *A pedagogically authoritarian school*. A capitalist system has a material stake in such schools. Part of the ideological preparation, the indoctrination of tomorrow's citizens and tomorrow's employees comes from the school. An obedient, disciplined work force prepared for the non-democratic life of the business world, and accustomed to do what it is told is a must for factory or corporate life.

Given the internal conflict between our democratic ethos and our anti-democratic economic institutions, it should surprise no one that the varied and ever-new experiments aimed at fundamentally demo-

cratizing american education have met and will meet the implacable opposition of the *real* educational establishment, the corporate system.

Nevertheless, schools geared to the needs of children as children, not a cogs in the wheels of industry, are something to be fought for today even though they can only be fully realized in a society whose basic institutions are democratic, and are therefore internally consistent with pedagogically and structurally democratic schools.

John Dewey, America's foremost philosopher, was the founder of “progressive education” in our country. But it took a war and a revolution (World War I, and the Russian Revolution of 1917) to convince him that our schools could not be democratic, much less be the spearhead for changing society. Belatedly, but not too late, he realized that the basic socio-economic pattern of a society shape the real content of education and even its forms. Dewey would therefore have had no illusions about contemporary nostrums such as vouchers or performance-based certification.

Dewey's bad experience in the Soviet Union strengthened his appreciation of the actual relation between the schools and society. The USSR, in its early, pristine revolutionary democratic spirit, ardently embraced Dewey's work and invited him to implement his policies on a mass scale. But as the USSR became an increasingly bureaucratic society it moved to reject his views in favor of the most traditional forms—rote learning, the abandonment of co-education (until recently), uniforms in the class room, etc.

As a result of these experiences Dewey became a socialist—a partisan of the view that socialism is indispensable to a consistently democratic society and to a child-oriented, not market-oriented, school.

Becoming a socialist also heightened Dewey's conception of democracy. Democracy is not something which is exercised for ten minutes at the polling booth every few years, and then put into storage while the politicians run the show. Genuine democracy requires constant and direct forms of participation in decision making on every level including the economic, i.e., industrial democracy. Therefore unions and the right-to-strike were perceived by Dewey as more than mere defensive weapons for working people. He saw unions and the strike as means whereby individuals can actively and intimately participate in shaping events which govern their lives, and in doing so, even change themselves. (That is why even a socialist society must retain the right to strike). Dewey was consequently a strong advocate of the teacher-run-school. As a socialist he believed that such schools were valuable not just as an end-in-itself, but as a step toward a truly democratic society.

It was this awareness too which led Dewey to become a founding member of the AFT, and the source of the AFT motto—Democracy in Education; Education for Democracy. Today in AFT this motto is more observed in the breach than the practice. Our union has abandoned Dewey's concept of schools controlled by teachers and parents, not administrators.

The conflict between the two souls of America in the field of education is an ongoing one. It is the ideological expression of the deep-rooted antagonism between capitalism and those whose human and social needs are subordinated to it, the working people of America.

For generations, in the schools, the ruling class had its way. Reforms along the lines of Dewey and others won repeated victories. But they were paper victories. It was all form and no substance. Nothing really changed. Even after the recent decade of turmoil and innovation, our schools are not significantly different than they were before the period of the 60's.

One victory did emerge—the creation of mass teacher unions. But even this movement is in danger of having reached the limits of its effectiveness unless it takes a second giant step—a break with the conservative philosophy and practices of business unionism and the capitalist system which breeds it.

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