

1977

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

61ST ANNUAL CONVENTION

Boston, Massachusetts
August 15, 1977

REMARKS BY AFT PRESIDENT

ALBERT SHANKER

Thank you very much for inviting me here today.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Thank you very much, Dr. Boyer, we certainly look forward to working with you and the Administration over the next few years.

(Applause.)

"STATE OF THE UNION"

BY ALBERT SHANKER, AFT PRESIDENT

PRESIDENT SHANKER: This is the time in our program each year when I have the opportunity to share with you some thoughts; talk about some of our problems; discuss how we intend to deal with those problems. As we look back we can say that over the last few years, perhaps more clearly than anyone else on the education scene, we were able to predict, we were able to see what was coming.

We came to these meetings, and meetings of our locals and State federations, and we talked about the decline in enrollment that was about to take place. We talked about the school closings. We talked about what would happen when teachers would no longer be hired and we would have many unemployed teachers pressing for the jobs of those who were fortunate enough to have them. We talked about increasing racial conflict as newer minority groups, college graduates,

after working for many years finally made it, finally got the ticket, the college degree, only to find that there were no jobs.

As I look at our Convention program and see that sometime during the Convention we will be having a very hot debate on the question of the Bakke Case before the Supreme Court, I wonder whether we would be spending five minutes on the question of the Bakke Case if we had an economy that provided jobs for everyone, rather than one that forces one group of people to pit themselves against another for the right to work.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We talked about the coming squeeze on money, tax problems, and the tough stance that public employers take in the bargaining process.

Well, we were right, and we have done something about it. Not enough to avoid the problems, but we have done some things which at least have put us in a better position to deal with them. I think our first major effort has been to shift our emphasis away from an exclusive concern with collective bargaining to a shared concern. Yes, we are still there bargaining and we are not going to stop, but we have shifted our concern so that we devote equal attention to the political scene. Of course I am talking about elections, but not only about elections, I am talking about building coalitions with

other groups in order to bring about change.

We have proposed answers to some of our problems. It is still tough to sit and see eight, or nine, ten million people in this country sitting home, really miserable, doing nothing, collecting unemployment insurance, collecting welfare checks at a time when we don't have day-care facilities and don't have facilities for early childhood programs; when we send children whose parents are working home to tough neighborhoods to fend for themselves at a time when they should be getting either education, or recreational programs; that we are spending as much money keeping people in a miserable state as we would have to spend in order to provide jobs and services, and we have still not been able to turn that around.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: But we did make a difference. I know that each and every one of you can undoubtedly report that, were it not for your local or your State federation there would be someone who is now in office in your State or city who wouldn't have made it. There would have been someone else there. There is no doubt in my mind that the margin of victory for President Carter and Vice President Mondale in a number of States is directly attributable to the efforts that were made by the American Federation of Teachers.

I know that in recent months, as we looked at some

of the statements and some of the decisions made by the President, we go through a process that we always go through when we help elect somebody - there are times when we have had doubts. There are times when we have asked ourselves, "Is that why we have worked to hard", times when we were very disappointed. I must confess that I have had many of those times, too.

But I think it is important that we not work ourselves into a position where because we are disappointed with one, or two, or five, or ten things that are done, that we don't give ourselves the opportunity to have a fair and honest picture of what we have actually done. There is a tremendous difference between this Administration and the one that preceded it, and if we don't admit it to ourselves, we are doing ourselves a very great injustice.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: In the previous eight years we faced each year a President who reduced the education budget by a billion or more dollars. We had to go in, you had to start postcards, and telegrams and lobbying, and then finally - victory. What was the victory each year? We had eight victories under the Nixon-Ford years. Those victories were after a long, terrible, bitter fight - we managed to restore what we had in the first place. And then it was vetoed. And

then we were given another victory, and that was the opportunity to override the veto so that we could get once again what we had in the first place.

Well, that was not true this year. We didn't have a President who came in with massive cuts and reductions. We had a President that came in with what we had before, plus a few increases. And then we had the pleasure of fighting the President and the Administration - not to restore what we already had, but to make major improvements over what we had, and we won that fight. That certainly put us in a better position than we were in during the previous eight years.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We are always going to be in that position. I can tell you right now that, no matter what the President of the United States puts on the table for education, it is my job to say that it is not enough.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: It is my job to try to increase it.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: And just because that is our job to do, we shouldn't convince ourselves that when we have a President that is doing more for us than the previous ones, that we have developed strong dislikes because of that process

and that fight. We not only increased education moneys, a massive jobs bill was signed. We met with the President and Vice President several weeks ago; we discussed a number of issues. One of those issues was the fact that hundreds of millions of dollars of CETA money were going into private industry to conduct educational programs. We turned to the President and Vice President of the United States and said, "If the government has money for vocational education, for guidance counseling and for job training, we think that this Administration ought to say that the first institution that should have the opportunity to do that job is the public schools in this country; and only if they can't do it should that money be farmed out elsewhere.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We are meeting on that, we are making very good headway. There is now a program for movement towards a federal takeover of welfare costs, which will mean more money for States and localities for education. There will be a program of tax reform. There is a program about to be announced, which will be a program for the cities of this country.

So, we made a difference and the Administration is moving. They are moving in our direction. We are not going

to be satisfied, and we are not going to be happy. I am not happy with the timing of welfare reform; I am not happy with the amounts involved, but at least a proposal is on the table, we are part of the way there. Now our job is to lobby and make sure that proposal is met.

Now, we have before us at this Convention a number of key problems and issues. There is no particular coherence or logic, or pattern to them. I suppose that if I were to try to develop some unifying theme in the topics that I am going to cover in the next few minutes it is the notion that everything is sort of connected with everything else. You can't separate education; you can't separate national issues from international issues; that you can't separate educational issues from labor issues; that all these things are there together and it is a big picture that we have to keep our eyes on, and a big picture that we have to educate teachers to watch because it is very difficult.

The first of these major concerns that I want to talk about is on the national agenda, and it deals with labor law reform. I am sure that whenever I go to a teacher meeting and start talking about labor law reform generally the people in the audience feel, "Well, here we are, Al has been sent on a mission by the labor movement to do something for somebody

else." So, I want to say, if we manage to get the labor laws of this country reformed, we will have done the greatest single thing which we could do, to bring about massive improvements in education in this country.

Now, this connection is not far fetched at all. In the first place, let's take a look at where teachers have the right to organize. Where do we have the right to bargain collectively; where do we spend more on a public school system? If you take a look at those States in this country where we have organization, and where we have public support, and where we have influence on legislation on what is good public support for education, those are places where there is a labor movement. Show me a place where teachers still don't have collective bargaining and don't have any rights, and those are the States that do not have a labor movement.

In helping to develop laws which will enable those workers who want to, to organize, we are building a political atmosphere in States which will help teachers as well.

Now, I remember not many years ago, mid 1950s, when I was active first as a volunteer in what was then the New York Teachers' Guild, we had a newspaper. It came out once a month, a four-page printed newspaper called "The Guild Bulletin". Most of the members of the New York Teachers' Guild

at that time - about five percent of the teachers in the city - wanted the newspaper delivered to them in a plain, unmarked envelope, sent to their homes, in 1952, '53, '54, '55, '56. One of my contributions in organizing that local was to ask members to distribute the union newspaper in schools and put it in the letter boxes so that someone would publicly acknowledge that he or she was a union member.

Now, if that kind of fear existed in the City of New York, the labor town in this country, then what kind of fear exists in North Carolina, South Carolina - I am certain I am going to miss a State - Virginia, etc. Now, this is what we are in one of the few democratic countries in the world where we do not have 98 percent, or 95 percent, or 90 percent of the workers in this country organized, we have only about 25 percent. Why aren't they organized? Is it that the workers in those States don't want unions; is it that they don't want contracts or grievance procedures, or higher salaries? It is not that at all.

Take a look at J. P. Stevens. They petitioned for a union and the factory closes up and moves to another State. By the way, that is good reason for passing labor law reform. A lot of these factories in these Southern States that needed tough labor laws came from your States, from my State. We

lost the taxes for education from those companies. It is about time we told the industries within our States that if they move south they are going to have labor laws down there that are just as good as the ones we have up here.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: There is another reason when I say it is the greatest single thing that we can do to promote the cause of education in this country. You go to the Congress of the United States and you try to get a good piece of legislation out of the Senate, and you need 60 percent of the votes to prevent a filibuster - not 50 percent of the votes, but 60. So, you have national polls, and the polls show that the public favors welfare reform; the public favors tax reform; the public favors a national health security program; the public favors increased aid to education. You would think you have a majority in the Congress to go for it, but usually it is very difficult to get 60 percent to stop that small group.

Now, what group is it in the Senate of the United States that is able to hold up this legislation? Where do they come from? Why do they always come back with the same attitudes? That is because those are States where the Right to Work Committees prevail, there isn't very much of a labor movement. If we could build the same strength in the labor

movement in those States we would be able to permanently shift that margin in the Congress of the United States, a margin which would make the difference between going home from each Session of Congress each year, getting a few things, but missing out on most of the big ones; or going there and finally being able to make some very major break-throughs. A labor movement in two or three of those States would bring us four or six Senators who would have different views than those that come from those States now.

So, this is the first priority, labor law reform because it is not just a help workers organize - sure, that is great. It is not just to help teachers organize - that will happen too. It is to help each and every one of us to prevent the erosion of our economies within our own States, and it is also to change the entire politics of the Congress of the United States so that we can have a better chance of putting through the legislation we need.

Now, a second point I would like to make. We are going to be talking about it at this Convention, we are going to be talking about it frequently throughout the year, and that is -- well, I was talking for a few minutes before this session here and one of the speakers said that he just read a book on David Dubinsky, the former president of the Inter-

national Ladies Garment Workers Union. I remember Dubinsky once speaking at Madison Square Garden to a group of taxi workers, taxi drivers who were not yet organized. They were a very tough group to convince, highly individualistic. Dubinsky stood up there and started reminiscing about the early days of the Garment Unions. He said back in the 1880s the clothing workers of New York City were only making the following amounts, and they were starving; they were working an 80-hour week, and they had no protection at all. So, what did they do? They had a massive meeting and they formed a union; they elected a committee. The committee tried to negotiate. The employer wouldn't meet with them. They went out on strike, and as a result of the strike they got a slight increase in salary and slight reduction in hours, and some improvements in working conditions.

Then Dubinsky said, "What do you think they did after that? It was very simple, the strike was over, the negotiations were over, they disbanded the union. They didn't need it any more."

Dubinsky pointed out that it took the garment workers something like 30 years to realize that it would be much better to build a permanent institution because you needed it all the time.

Now, why do I repeat that story? I repeat the story because we had a great organization for the campaign. We elected a President and Vice President of the United States, Senators, Representatives, State Legislators, Governors, Mayors. We did a great job. And the day after it was over we said, "That's great". We congratulated ourselves, we had some parties. We went back, and we were absolutely sure that the people we had elected would remember for the next four years. Imagine, teachers thinking that students could remember over that long period of time --

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: -- without some sort of brush-up. Well, we learned pretty soon that didn't work when it came to the first piece of labor legislation, the situs picketing bill came to the Congress of the United States. Then, after we got hit that way - and by the way, a lot of people say, "Well, the situs picketing bill, that was only building trades and it doesn't make much difference to us."

Well, aside from whether it is important to the building trades or not, every one of you read in Time and in News Week, and in U.S. News and World Reports, and in every major paper in the country, that was not only a defeat for the building trade, every columnist in the country viewed

this as a feeling that the labor movement itself was weak; that the Congress was not going to move in the direction of liberal or labor legislation. We felt that every single one of us suffered a loss when that loss came because it meant that we had to re-establish our power with legislators and with the Congress of the United States.

Now, why did it happen? It happened because we didn't do anything. We were not asked to do anything. We were too confident. I didn't send a letter out to you, or a telegram asking you to make a single phone call, or send a letter, or send a telegram, and we got very badly beaten. We got beaten because the Right to Work Committees did their work. They learned from us during the election campaign, but they did not disband their union after the election; they kept it going.

So, we were in the horrible position of having elected an Administration and then the pay-off came to the Right to Work Committee that managed to get the letters and telegrams in. Well, the Right to Work Committee has a lot of money - we will never match them in money. But we have more members, and we are not going to allow this sort of defeat to happen again. We are going to maintain a political machine throughout the year.

One of the purposes of this Convention is to commit ourselves to review every piece of important legislation that comes before the Congress of the United States, every single

one of us, every single one of our members are going to show the Congress and the President that there are more people in the labor movement in this country than all the Right to Work Committees put together.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: I think, also, we have to remember that the President was elected in a very close election. When it is a very close election, that means everybody elected him; that means he has to be very careful not to lose anyone's vote and everybody pushing him. If we are not going to do that, we are not going to get a fair share.

Well, we are going to be in there on a lot of important things. Ernie Boyer mentioned Title I, that is up next year, and I fear that because of the budget problems facing small districts in this country, that there is going to be an effort to take Title I money away from areas of poverty and spread it out all over. Well, Dave Seldon used to have a little phrase which I think he used on Title I. He said, "Anybody that buys a bottle of gin and drinks it one drop a day is wasting his money because unless you have enough of it, you can't get the desired effect."

(Laughter.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Now, the same is true of education, and the same is true of concentrating your funds in

areas of need. So, we are going to have more than a dialogue on that; I am sure there are going to be fights on it. We have to continue the struggle on CETA to make sure that we get it. We have to make sure that welfare reform is big in terms of money and it is moved up soon.

We should not forget for the last three, four years we have been talking about universal early childhood education; we have been talking about teacher internships; we have been talking about life-long education. Well, now we have a President, and especially a Vice President who has been committed to these programs all his life, and we ought to make sure that they have the kind of public support so that they can go to the Congress of the United States and say, "We are doing that because we believe in it and because the people want it." That is going to be part of the program, a renewal of these programs we have been talking about but didn't have a chance under the previous Administration.

Now I should say a word also about education for all the handicapped - that is a double-edged program. Sure, it is about time we have legislation providing for education for the handicapped; but so far the Federal Government is not paying for it. So far there is legislation there which, while it might provide for education for the handicapped, it could

also be extremely dangerous, both to students and to teachers. It could be used as an excuse for mainstreaming and taking away some special programs from students who need them; mainstreaming them in order to cut corners and to reduce costs. It could be used, also, as a new way of financing non-public and private school systems which supposedly - someone will claim - meet the needs. This, too, is an area we will have to keep working on.

Well, I have talked about several areas and I want to move into another one now, and that is the area of international affairs. I know that many of our members will say, "Look, I don't like to get mixed up in these foreign policy things." But let's take a look at some of the things we have been doing. For the second year in a row I was selected by the President of the United States on the recommendation from the AFL-CIO to be a delegate to the International Labor Organization in Geneva. This was a very important convention, both from the point of view of the good things that happened, and the point of view of the bad things.

It is great to have an organization on the international sphere that stands for the right to collective bargaining. It is great to have an organization which, when labor leaders are jailed for going on strike will intervene in

international circles. It is important to have that, not so much in this country because we enjoy perhaps more labor rights and freedom than almost any other country in the world. But think of most other countries in the world, they need that sort of protection coming from outside, even if it is in most cases a voice of morality and without the full force of law.

This year I served on a committee that drafted the first international convention on the rights of public employees to organize and to bargain collectively, so that now in any nation in the world that does not provide those rights to public employees, they are subject to be put on an unfair labor list, internationally with some sanctions on the part of some other nations - a very important step.

But at that same meeting which adopted rights for public employees there were the most horrible violations of due process. These have been going on now for a couple of years. The ILO has become very much like the United Nations, an artificial bloc of Arab and Third World countries, and Communist nations automatically attacking the United States; attacking Israel, and violating the basic procedures of the ILO itself.

The ILO has always had a procedure that when a nation is accused of doing something wrong, that nation has the right to get up and say, "We deny doing this, and we invite

you to come and to inspect." Well, several years ago Israel was accused of mistreating Arab workers. Israel stood up and said, "We deny this, we would like you to come to see", and the ILO voted overwhelmingly that they didn't want to come and see, they wanted to immediately have a trial and condemn - the first time in the history of the ILO that that happened.

Well, we have been involved in that. We have also been involved internationally in UNESCO. We have supported UNESCO. We have had resolutions; we have had members of this organization who have served on UNESCO throughout the years. We had bitter fights in this country with right-wingers who did not want us to participate after World War II in any sort of international body. We had fights with school boards who didn't want teachers in the United Nations and UNESCO, and here we are working in a UNESCO which is now about to adopt a resolution which says that each region of the world has a right to exclude reporters and to edit and censor and create its own news stories on its region.

Theoretically they are saying that the Western papers have so much dominance that the only way they are going to get the truth out is to keep the Western industrial countries out and give out their own news stories.

Well, what are we talking about? Here we are, an organization we helped to support and we helped to create, and

it is on the verge of having an international endorsement of the worst crime of abdication of freedom of the press, official censorship, sanctioned by the United Nations. We are involved in that, too.

Yes, we have been working closely with the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions, and at this Convention we will have some visitors from abroad. I have been through a number of countries, and we have worked in the area of human rights. I want to say when our Executive Committee met with President Carter the first thing that we congratulated him on was, "We are proud of the fact that you have once again made human rights an international issue because that is what the teacher union movement and trade union movements stand for."

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Show me a dictatorship and I will point out that the very first thing a dictator did was to throw the union leaders in jail, or to kill them, and to disband the union movement. But we are not as some people are -- there are a lot of people for human rights, but they are selectively for human rights. Some people are for human rights only in Chile, or only in Spain when Franko was there; or only in Greece when the dictators were there; but they are not for human rights when those rights were violated by Cambodia, or

when they were violated by Cuba, or when they were violated by the Soviet Union --

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: -- and I want to say that our position throughout the years, throughout past years, and I hope that there will be a re-affirmation at this Convention, is that we stand for human rights, and that we will protest the violation of human rights regardless of whether the dictatorship is fascist or Communist; regardless of whether it is a white oppression or a black oppression; regardless of what the politics or the ideology is - we will work against it equally anywhere in the world.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Now, the fifth of the items which will take some time and some debate here deals with our own ability to function in the years to come. There will be two major areas of concern here. One of them is the dues increase - and that is never popular. In spite of the fact that we organized; in spite of the fact that we won collective bargaining elections; in spite of our successful efforts in the political and legislative field; because of the fact that the school population is getting smaller, with all of our organizing effort we have lost members this year. So did the NEA lose members.

It is hard to say how many, it depends upon if you look at one report, 100,000; another report, 200,000; a third one is 300,000, all reports distributed and spoken about at their own conventions. But it is obvious that they, too, lost membership, not through any fault of their own, they undoubtedly did a lot of organizing as well, but we have lost membership and so have they. That means the loss of dues income at a time when everything, lobbying costs, postage, staff salaries, rents, everything is going up. If we do not have an adequate dues increase we will have a reduction in our effectiveness.

Now, the number of years that are left during which we will have good organizing prospects, teachers who still do not have collective bargaining; associations who have not yet become unions, that is not going to go on forever. There is a limited period of time during which we can organize. Whatever we take during that period of time will determine for years and years of time our ability to influence legislation, what our power will be to get the things we believe in and that we want.

This is the time to make that investment, not after it is too late. Many of us are here today because a much smaller teachers union, 10, 20, 30, 50 years ago people made investments when they paid their dues, and their dues money

brought us the message, brought us help in collective bargaining campaigns; brought us literature, organizers, information. We have to make that same investment today. We have a good record, and there is no reason why our members will not be willing to do it if they understand what is at stake.

There is a second organizational issue that is important. We are recommending, the Executive Council, a change in our constitution which will permit us to organize not teachers alone, and not paraprofessionals alone, not college professors alone, but to enable us to bring in other employees who should be with us, and who want to be organized by us. We have some already. We have a group of lawyers who work for the State Education Department in Wisconsin. I must confess that if I were a strict constructionist and look at the Constitution, I don't really know what gave us the right to allow them into our organization. But I think that if we had proposed something like this some years ago -- well, some years ago there was tremendous opposition to have anybody but teachers in the organization. Those of us who now do have aides, or paraprofessionals, or guidance counselors and school secretaries know that we have not been weakened, that all of us have been strengthened by and all, and that we will be strengthened further by the measures we are proposing.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Now, I am sorry that in a talk of this sort I have to spend a few negative minutes on our opposition organization. The idea that we proposed several years ago is still a good one. It is still the height of insanity for the NEA and the AFT to be fighting each other in New York, and Florida, and California, and all across the country when a small part of that effort directed at the Congress of the United States and the legislators would solve our problems.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We are still willing, we are still eager to sit down and to start talking, and to take whatever kind of effort and understanding will be needed to eventually bring this about.

Meanwhile, though, we should not fool ourselves into thinking there are no differences between the organizations. The differences have been reduced, both organizations are unions, both pursue collective bargaining, both are very much involved in politics and on many of the issues - many of them - we are on the same side. But there still is a difference.

The NEA this year tried to introduce into the Congress of the United States a collective bargaining bill which would have been a disaster. It is a collective bargaining

bill which would have given each and every State the right to enact its own anti-strike provisions, and would have given each and every State the ultimate right to determine salaries and working conditions - a horrible bill which was described by one of the leading officials of the NEA in several full pages in the newspapers. But, I am happy to report to you that after months of effort they were never able to get a Congressman to introduce the legislation.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Now, I must also say at a time when we need tax reform, welfare reform, more money for education, more jobs programs, when these are the labor law reforms, these are the things that we need, the NEA is now mounting a national campaign on what they conceive to be the most important issue before educators in the country today - a Cabinet Member for Education.

Well, it is just plain silly when all these important issues are before us, to mobilize teachers on what is largely a question of whether we will be combined with other agencies or not.

Now, there are other issues, too. The NEA this year at its convention claimed that one of the major differences between our organizations is the issue of civil rights. They have their election quotas, and we do not. Well, this year the

NEA made an effort to give equal rights to many of its members who are paraprofessionals and aides. They do not have equal rights, paraprofessionals cannot run for office in the NEA. They take their dues. They have taxation, but they do not have the same rights. The NEA apparently may be interested in civil rights in one place or another, but they are not much interested in civil rights in their own organization because they overwhelmingly voted against the rights of many of their own members to hold office on an equal basis with teachers. I am happy to say that is not a problem we have in this organization, or ever will.

Now, we have another issue. As you know, the NEA has been declared a labor union by the Labor Department.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Do you know what that means? That means they are under Landrum-Griffin, and that means they have to conduct elections democratically; and that means that they have to disclose to their own members and to the Government of the United States their finances. The NEA is now in court claiming that they are not a labor union so that they don't have to disclose their own finances, and so that they don't have to conduct fair elections under the Landrum-Griffin Law. So, there still is a difference.

There is another difference, too. This last year we invited Vladimir Bukovsky, a prominent Soviet dissident who was punished by the Soviet Union for having interesting ideas. He was sent to various psychiatric wards as the treatment or punishment. In international affairs as well the NEA is quite different from the American Federation of Teachers. We have worked with dissidents who have managed to escape these regimes while the NEA has worked with the various people who oppress them. The NEA brought over here the person who is supposedly the leader of the teachers union in the Soviet Union; and never once in all of the published discussions did the NEA raise the question of what would happen if teachers went on strike in your country, or tried to get collective bargaining.

So, in each and every one of these fields there are still differences, but I hope that we can get together.

Well, many things have happened this year. There has been a period of very rapid change, and I want to conclude with a number of the things that we can be very proud of.

I want to bring to your special attention something that I know you have been very happy about, and that is that our publications, especially our news magazine, "The American Educator", which I know all of you have received with great

enthusiasm --

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We have increased our professional activities, our press conferences, have been working very closely with the Department of Education in setting up the structuring of teacher centers. The Detroit Federation scored a major victory before the Supreme Court of the United States on the Agency Shop --

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: And teachers in both New York State and Florida overcame a massive attack of millions and millions of dollars by the NEA, and I am happy to say that in those States the NEA has nothing to show for, except for cancelled checks which they have wasted in massive organizing campaigns.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: I would like to spend just a minute or two on one State and one city - yes, you guessed it, it is New York. New York, in spite of the fact that the NEA has split up the teachers of the State, they remain united. The effectiveness of teacher unity is not something that one has to debate about, will it, or won't it be more effective to have one teacher organization that is united, rather than

two that are fighting each other. Yes, there is a small NEA in New York. Yes, they are spending lots of money. Yes, we have to spend lots of money keeping them out of a lot of places that they are trying to get into. But basically 95, or 98 percent of the teachers in the State of New York have decided to remain with NYSUT and with the American Federation of Teachers; and the result of that was a legislative session which has been unprecedented in the history not only that State, but in the history of this country. Over 35 bills that were NYSUT-sponsored bills were passed by the legislature, signed by the Governor, including an outstanding increase in aid to education, a tenure law which results in final and binding arbitration, an Agency Shop bill, and the strengthening of the powers of the New York State Public Employee Relations Board to permit that board to enforce unfair labor practices against Boards of Education.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: It shows what teacher unity can do. It shows what teacher organization can do. It shows what affiliation with labor can do. It shows something else, too.

Last year and the year before those of you who spoke to delegates from New York City found that those delegates

who usually came here - a happy, optimistic crew - were very despondent, were faced with thousands, and thousands of lay-offs. They were faced with their colleagues leaving; faced with class size soaring, and faced with large-scale contract violations and faced with the question of whether the city itself would go bankrupt and everything, the school system, pensions, contracts, collective bargaining, that all of that might disappear. If it disappeared in New York it would not be for New York alone. I know that all of you throughout the country have faced at one time or another in the last year or two a school superintendent, or a school board member, or a legislator, or a Governor, or a Mayor who said, "Well, we are not going to give you that because we don't want to go down the way New York City is about to go down." New York was about to be used as the excuse for every single anti-labor character of the country for not being decent to their employees.

Well, there is a difference now. New York didn't go down. New York City's teachers played a major role working with banks; a major role in terms of investments; a major role in terms of putting the city back on its feet. This year New York City teachers, as a result of their political influence were able to get the salary increases which were negotiated in 1975.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We were able to get a court decisions so that the fines which were supposed to have been \$5 million were reduced to \$50,000.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We now have a decision from the Federal Court declaring that taking the check-off away from some unions to punish them, and not others, is a violation of the Constitution of the United States and will not be endorsed.

(Applause.)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We have seen thousands of our laid-off colleagues returning, and with many of the improvements in working conditions that had been taken away, many of those are restored.

Now, it is important to look at that because Philadelphia is now being hit with the same kind of crisis. Bob Healey had to leave the Convention today to return because of problems in Chicago. I hope that it doesn't happen, but I know that many of you will in this next year or two face some very tough and dark moments that teachers in New York City faced. There will be moments when for the first time in years your members, who at this moment have this great faith in their union organization will turn around and say, "What

good is the union, what good is the contract when all this is happening?"

All the work it took all these years to build will be in danger because an immediate loss of that magnitude leads our members naturally to lose faith in the union collective bargaining process and the political process itself. It is important to have before us an example of those who have returned from the world of the near deal and begin to feel some sense of optimism and some sense of cheer in terms of their organizational relations.

Well, what does all this mean? A couple of years ago a speech by an AFT president was simple, all he had to do was come out for collective bargaining - that was revolutionary. A few years later for the right to strike, the teacher power. A few years later it was for political power.

We can now see there is no single answer to any one of our problems. There are problems with Washington; there are problems with welfare, with jobs, with education, with State Legislatures, with labor law reform - yes, even in international affairs there is not only humane and human consideration, but there are economic and job considerations. Just spend five seconds thinking to yourselves how many teachers in this country are now unemployed because there are millions of other

people are unemployed who are unemployed because of what happened to the price of oil a few years ago. If we don't see that there is a relationship between what we do in the world and what we are going to have here, we are missing the boat.

But, we have every reason to believe that we will be effective. We have succeeded, we have a good Administration. We organized politically and we will keep that organization going throughout the years to make sure that we get our bills. We will continue to try to bring about unity between teachers in this country. The way we are going to do it, through these days of this Convention we are going to develop a program, we are going to educate each other. We are going to have a message to bring back to teachers. It is not going to be a simple message, it is not a simple slogan, it is complex. What we are going to have to bring back is the message that we are living in a tough, complicated world where 10, or 15, or 20 major issues which at this very moment they have no interest in, will decide the future of teachers; the future of collective bargaining; the future of public education in this country.

I am confident that with the work we do, when we leave this Convention we are going to succeed in the next few years, and we are going to get our programs through.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

SEC.-TREAS. PORTER: We are not finished, we still have a major portion of our program. I would like to introduce Ed McElroy, AFT Vice President from Rhode Island. He will explain the extremely important part of the AFT program, the AFT legislative network, things we have to do at this session.

DELEGATE EDWARD MCELROY (AFT Vice President, Rhode Island): Thank you, Bob.

This is only going to take a couple of minutes, but because I believe in union democracy, I believe it is important for you to understand the inner workings of the union. I want you to understand how a vice president gets chosen to follow President Shanker. What happens, Secretary-Treasurer Porter comes into the Pre-Convention Executive Council meeting with 30 straws, 29 of equal length.

The next item on the agenda really is labor law reform, and President Shanker extremely well explained to you this morning the background of that issue presently before Congress, as well as our own slate in that particular issue.

Make sure that we take back the message that if we are not successful in this fight before Congress on this particular labor issue, that we probably are not going to be successful on any of the other issues that are important to us.

I will ask you to do two things. First of all, in the past when we have had an important legislative issue before Congress, what we have done is depended on the National Office, and depended on an ad hoc legislative committee established to come in and lobby for our legislation. We want to start something different, and we want to start it today.

We are asking that each local and each State federation appoint one person who will act as a legislative contact person for the National Office. Their responsibility will be to organize letter-writing campaigns, phone calls, telegrams, those kinds of things when we have an important labor issue that we have to lobby for.

We are asking you to do one other thing if you all will. When you take your kits out, the Convention Kits that you received when you registered for the Convention, you will notice that there is a folder called "Legislative Network". Will you all take that out for me, please? If you don't have one, come forward, the Sergeants of Arms have some extra copies.

Now, we are going to do something here that I hope all of you will do when you go back to your locals and to your State feds. Inside that folder are two or three sheets of paper that look like stationery. What we want you to do is something very simple. Take your pen, look up in the little

booklet, a red-white-and-blue booklet that is in your folder the name of your Congressman, the name of at least one of your Senators and write them a short letter - right now, if you will - telling them that you support the bill presently before the Education and Labor Committee of the Congress. The number of the bill is H.R. 8410. All we need is a short letter. Address the envelope, and when you are going out the door, hand it to the Sergeants of Arms, they will collect it; and we will make sure that it gets to the addressee.

We are asking you to do this. We realize that there are issues that are more important, or we think are more important or more germane to what we are doing on a daily basis. However, in terms of our long-term goals it is extremely important that labor and the American Federation of Teachers as part of that labor coalition be successful in this fight.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

SEC.-TREAS. PORTER: Now, take the time on this extremely important activity, encourage the people that you see, that were not here, to also write their letters. The AFT will mail them. In labor law reform your cooperation is needed.