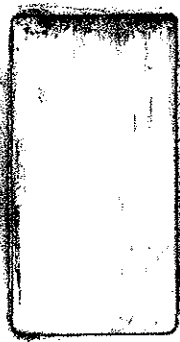


✓  
Shower him - very tough,  
very capable of leading  
@ these guys, outdoors  
them at every turn.  
The gut you would want  
speaking for you.



# **MEET THE PRESS**

Produced by Lawrence E. Spivak

Guest:

**Albert Shanker**

President, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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President, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

Moderator:

**Edwin Newman-NBC News**

Panel:

A.H. Raskin - The New York Times

Eric Wentworth - Washington Post

George F. Will - National Review

Lawrence E. Spivak

Sept 1 '74

**Mr. Newman:** Our guest today on Meet the Press is the newly elected president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker. Mr. Shanker is also president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, executive vice president of New York State United Teachers and a vice president of the AFL-CIO. He is one of the most powerful and controversial figures in public education.

We will have first questions now from Lawrence E. Spivak, regular member of the Meet the Press panel.

**Mr. Spivak:** Mr. Shanker, in a recent New York City television interview, you spoke of accomplishing the purposes of the teacher union movement now that you are president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Can you tell us what you consider the major purposes of the Teacher Union movement?

**Mr. Shanker:** I think like any other union the major purpose, of course, is to see to it that teachers in America have the economic advantages, that they have an organization which fights for them both in terms of salaries and working conditions. This is the major job of any union.

Now, when it comes to a teacher union, this has additional importance because our ability to do this successfully has some effect on the quality of education. The extent to which we can provide security for teachers, the extent to which we can limit or reduce class size, the extent to which we can fight for proper training facilities for teachers, these will have a great effect on the quality of education and what happens to our students.

**Mr. Spivak:** You have been instrumental in bringing New York City teacher salaries up to a maximum of I believe it is \$20,350. What have you done for children's education?

**Mr. Shanker:** I think there is no question that in the 14 years that we have represented teachers in New York City that a good deal has happened for children. Class size is

down from where it was with 45 children in a class down to about 30. We have sponsored training programs for teachers. The turnover of teachers within the system, even before the present depression and oversupply, ceased in New York City because of the attractiveness of the position there. I think these are all things that have had a great effect on improving the quality of education.

**Mr. Spivak:** What is your explanation then for the fact that two-thirds of the elementary school pupils in New York City read below the national norm for their grades according to reports I have seen?

**Mr. Shanker:** I think the first thing that has to be said on that is that half of the children in the country read below national norms because that is what is meant by a norm, half are above and half are below it, so the figure isn't as startling and as terrible as it seems.

Now, the other part of the problem, of course, is that New York, like other cities, has had a changing population. We now have many children who have come in from Puerto Rico, many who have come in from the South and when we measure reading scores we are not measuring poor quality of teaching. What we are measuring are problems from the rest of society. We are measuring the problems of broken homes, of poverty, the effect of discrimination, lack of health care. This, by the way, is the other reason that teachers should be in the labor movement, that you really can't solve educational problems within schools alone. Teachers have to join with others to help to undo some of these vast social problems which have this horrible impact on the ability of some children to learn.

**Mr. Raskin:** Mr. Shanker, the AFL-CIO, of which you are a vice president, is about to organize a new public employees department. It will start with about two million members, and the hope, I understand, is that you will be able to take all eventually of the 13½ million public employees into that group. Is that going to be in your estimation a good thing for the country? Will that

make this group too powerful in its relation to the government?

**Mr. Shanker:** No, I don't think so. I think that up to this time certainly the public employee has not been well organized. I think as a matter of fact if you just look at the conditions — look at the fact that the average teacher's salary in this country today is somewhere around \$8,500 and I think that in a sense answers the question as to why the public employees, whether the public employees are too well organized or have been too powerful up to this point. Now the fact that somewhere down the road years and years from now one group or another might become too powerful, that is always a possibility. If that happens, I am sure there would be some kind of governmental reaction — there always is when a group has too much power. Meanwhile public employees are in a position of not even having the basic rights that other workers have within our society and I would hope that this public employee department would fight very hard to place public employees under the National Labor Relations Act so that we can at least start with the same rights that other workers got back in the Thirties.

**Mr. Raskin:** That would, of course, include the right to strike on a national basis. Wouldn't that be a great threat to the public welfare?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I guess that would depend on who went on strike and for how long and what the consequences were. I believe very strongly that, like other democratic nations in this world, the United States should not, or state and local governments should not have a blanket restriction on public employees' strikes. Now there is no other democratic nation in the world where teachers', for instance, strikes are prohibited and there is no reason why in this respect we should resemble Iron Curtain countries rather than democratic nations. I would recognize, as every sane person would, that there are some strikes, private and public, which endanger public health or life and there society has a right to take

some action.

**Mr. Raskin:** Well, to take one specific situation. The President, as you know, has just decreed that there will be a three months' postponement or at least has asked Congress to postpone for three months a pay increase that federal employees are supposed to get. Is it conceivable to you that this new Public Employees Department might say that is dreadfully unfair to public employees and therefore we are going to withhold our labor?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I am sure that the department when it is established would say that that is terribly unfair, because it is, but I am also sure that it would not call a strike. It would be a federation very much like the Industrial Union Department or the Building Trades Department or the AFL-CIO itself and it is the individual unions that make the decisions and the members in those unions, as to whether they are going to call strikes and not these broad federations.

**Mr. Will:** Mr. Shanker, in your City of New York, whites are leaving the school system even faster than they are leaving the city itself. In Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn, the student population is already about three-quarters non-white. Do you believe that given the fact that the teachers in your school system are about nine out of ten white, that urban schools should institute affirmative action programs to make their staffs reflect the racial composition of their school districts?

**Mr. Shanker:** I am very much against the idea of quotas that a staff has to reflect on a numerical basis what the students are. Now we do not select teachers from the student body and the adult population of the city has quite a different racial and ethnic composition and we don't even select just from the adult population, we select from college graduates which has still a different basis. I do believe that there should be affirmative action. If by that you mean we ought to make sure that high quality education is provided for minority groups, that we provide open access to higher education, which we are doing in the City University, that we

provide special help to those students in universities who find it difficult to make it because of deficiencies in their earlier education, I think we ought to do everything to seek out minorities, to give them encouragement, to give them extra help, but I do not believe that standards should be changed for different groups. I think everyone who becomes, whether it is a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher or anything else, ought to meet whatever the proper standards are for that particular profession.

**Mr. Will:** Looking at the race question from the pupils' point of view now, a recent Supreme Court decision, that dealing with Detroit, held that really, except in rare circumstances, there is going to be no busing for integration purposes between cities — predominantly black and suburbs predominantly white. This means in many cities the school population will be predominantly black and therefore there will be many predominantly black schools into the future. Does this Supreme Court decision disturb you?

**Mr. Shanker:** I would say that I am disturbed by the fact that we can't bring changes about within our society on the basis of geographic lines and I am referring here not only to the question of busing. I would also refer to questions of equalizing school finance and I think that this type of decision which holds to a sanctity of local boundaries will make it much more difficult to get reform in that direction too.

**Mr. Will:** But you do favor busing across city suburban school district lines?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, not necessarily, but I certainly don't favor a prohibition of it. I think there are cases in which more than half of the children of this country are bused to school and if they are bused for ten other reasons there is no reason why they could not be bused to achieve some integration where that is deemed desirable, but I think the recent actions both with respect to amendments in Congress and the courts have not been helpful.

**Mr. Wentworth:** Mr. Shanker, President

Ford, speaking at Ohio State University the other day, said that steps should be taken to increase productivity, as one way to fight inflation.

What should teachers and specifically members of your union do to increase productivity?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I don't know if we talked any faster to the children whether that would be productive or whether they would learn more or less.

I think that the teachers' productivity can be measured very easily. It is — what we do is affect the productivity of everybody else in society, the computer people and the lawyers and the doctors and the engineers. I think teachers in our society have been very productive. The fact that we are the wealthiest nation on earth, the fact that we have moved so quickly, I think if teachers hadn't done their job, the rest of that productivity wouldn't be there.

I don't know how else one would measure a teacher's productivity.

**Mr. Wentworth:** But are you saying that teachers would be — should be immune to any specific steps to increase productivity at the current time when inflation is running at such a high rate?

**Mr. Shanker:** How would you increase teacher productivity, by putting more children in the classroom? Well, you may very well decrease the amount of learning that takes place. It is like saying increase the productivity of a surgeon by having him spend half the amount of time he usually does on an operation.

Well, he might be very productive in handling many more patients, but if they all died it wouldn't be greater productivity. I think that is the kind of thing we have to be concerned with, that the school doesn't become a factory model with time and motion studies. We realize we are dealing with children, with human beings and that probably the best way to get productivity is to put more quality especially into the early years of education so we are not left years later with millions of

people who have to be on public welfare rolls because we saved a few thousand dollars on a child when the child was 3, 4 and 5 years old, and then we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars later on in life trying to undo the damage that could have been taken care of in the first place.

**Mr. Wentworth:** Leaving productivity aside, but still concerned about inflation, should there be any restraints affecting teachers' salary increases?

**Mr. Shanker:** I think that when the interest rates come down to a place where the average middle-income person, the teacher, can afford to buy a home again, I think when prices are taken care of and when the huge runaway profits of some of the companies are taken care of, I think after all those things happen I think that would be the right time for the President to turn to teachers and other public employees and ask them to exercise restraint. Meanwhile, we have been on the losing end of this with 5.5 per cent increases while inflation has been going at better than ten per cent with no controls on the rest of the economy. I don't see why the public employee or employees in the private sector ought to be the only people in our country who are being asked to make sacrifices.

**Mr. Spivak:** Mr. Shanker, one of the subjects of controversy among teachers has been the question of merger between the American Federation of Teachers, which you head, and the National Education Association, which is the largest organization of its kind. How important do you consider a merger between your organization today?

**Mr. Shanker:** I think it is one of the all-important issues. I think it is disastrous. We have got hundreds of thousands of teachers who are unemployed; we have 1.5 million students in college who will become teachers within the next few years so that there will be one unemployed teacher for every one who is employed. We have got cutbacks in schools and education and while all of this is going on, the two national teachers organizations are spending a very substantial part of their budget with one teacher

group fighting another teacher group, and the best way to end that is for the organizations to come together, resolve their differences and to have one organization which would speak effectively.

That organization would have three million teachers in it. They would live in every election district in the country. They would be able to have an effective voice in their own profession, something that they have never had before. I can think of nothing more important on the agenda of the American Federation of Teachers.

**Mr. Spivak:** Mr. Shanker, if you were able to organize the millions of teachers in this country into one national union, it would be one of the most powerful unions in the nation. What would you seek to do with such power if you could get it?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I'd say two things: One, of course, is to improve school systems, which means for teachers and for children, but I think the other part of this is the contribution that teachers could make, teachers who see children coming to school without the proper clothing or without their health needs taken care of. I think teachers need the help of the rest of the labor movement in terms of improving their own conditions and status, but in return I think it is time that teachers as an organized force made some sort of contribution to bringing about social reform in this country and to doing for children what should be done within the other institutions within our society.

**Mr. Spivak:** Now, there are many of your critics who believe that you are one of the stumbling blocks to a merger because of your search for power and because of the power you have. Would you be willing to withdraw yourself entirely for the sake of this important merger which you yourself now urge?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I certainly wouldn't stand in the way, but I don't think that I am the issue. I think anyone who raises a question like that really doesn't have any faith in democratic processes. Any organization will, under the law, be a democratic

organization and the members of that organization will have a right to vote for the leaders that they want. I think to say that one individual is a stumbling block is really to say that the membership is stupid and should not be trusted and that we can't allow people to vote in a free election.

I think that would just be wrong.

**Mr. Spivak:** There seems to be some justification though for that criticism. You are now, for example, receiving \$25,000 as president of the United Federation of Teachers, \$25,000 as executive vice president of the New York State United Teachers and \$33,000 a year as president of the American Federation of Teachers, and you are also an executive vice president of the AFL-CIO. That is quite an accumulation of power for one man. Why it is necessary for you to run all these organizations?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, your facts are wrong.

**Mr. Spivak:** Are they? Will you correct me?

**Mr. Shanker:** I will correct you. I receive one salary and that is from the American Federation of Teachers. I receive none, any more, from the local. I receive none from the state. I receive a single annual salary from the national organization which is a little less than the figures you added up there, \$70,000 a year.

**Mr. Spivak:** I don't like to put this on the New York Times, but the figures of the New York Times recently published that you were getting all of these salaries. Have you recently given them up?

**Mr. Shanker:** No. Last year I received a salary of \$52,000 from the local. I have never been on more than one payroll and I am not on more than one payroll now.

**Mr. Spivak:** What about the power?

**Mr. Shanker:** I am elected to each of these positions and one of the issues that comes up in the election is, do we want someone who also holds another job and that is up to the membership to decide. It certainly is a legitimate issue and it was

an issue at our national convention.

**Mr. Raskin:** Mr. Shanker, you come out of the section of the trade union movement that is moving ahead, the public sector, where unions are still moving; the rest of the labor movement seems quite stagnant, in fact represents a reduced section of the total labor force. Many people, watching your meteoric rise, think that one day — we know that George Meany is indestructible; he still holds on, very healthy and very vigorous at 80—but it is conceivable some day George Meany may pass on and many people think you may take over the mantle.

If that did happen, what new dimensions, what new directions do you feel ought to be brought to the purposes of the labor movement?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, I don't think it is going to happen and my job is going to be to build a teacher union movement. I don't know what that speculation serves, but really it is way out of field. I might say I very much support the directions of the labor movement in which Mr. Meany has led the labor movement. I think a great job has been done in such areas as supporting the grape workers and Farah and the organization of public employees in the last 14 years. It took place under his leadership and I am not one of his critics; I am one of his supporters.

**Mr. Raskin:** But don't you feel there are many areas having to do with the quality of work life and so on, in which the labor movement is missing the boat and you are, of course, vice president of the Federation. Don't you feel there is something more they could do and that you might have some new initiatives instead of saying everything is just great the way we are going?

**Mr. Shanker:** Oh, I don't think anybody is saying everything is just great. I haven't heard Mr. Meany saying that either. But when you raise questions like the quality of work life you will have thousands of contracts coming up all across the country in the next few months and improving the quality of the work place costs money and when you sit there at the negotiating table with

the employer and there is a certain point where there is only a certain amount of money there and you know the people that you represent have just had a 5.5 per cent increase with ten per cent inflation, and they are five points behind already and you want to ask whether you are going to use that money to help them maintain their standard of living so that they can have the same amount of meat they had last year or the same kind of car they bought three years ago, whether they are going to spend the money on that or whether you are going to pipe some music into the workplace or do something else, it is a very tough decision to make because the work place can be a horrible place, but, on the other hand, not eating or not being able to pay for your home can be pretty horrible too. They are not easy decisions to make.

**Mr. Newman:** Three minutes left, gentlemen.

**Mr. Will:** Mr. Shanker, some critics say the public schools are like the Post Office; that they are a protected government monopoly insulated from competition and that their quality is declining as their cost increases and to cure that they advocate a voucher system in which the government would give to each parent purchasing power and he could shop around in a competitive marketplace for the school of his choice.

Are you categorically opposed to all such plans?

**Mr. Shanker:** I am categorically opposed to any such plans which would involve vouchers for any one public institution. I favor providing some choices and some options within the public school system so long as we don't have the hard type of scientific data as to what is right for each child. I think there should be some choices within the public schools, but I think moving to a voucher system would be destructive of public education in this country and I think it would be destructive not because people would be going to superior schools or better schools, they would be going to schools that had better gimmicks and advertising on radio and television and

in the newspaper. By the way, if you did go over to a voucher system in this country, essentially you would end up with the same buildings being sold to private schools because those are the only ones capable of housing that number of students, the same teachers, the same text books. You would end up with exactly the same thing but the only thing that would be missing are the governmental controls, the democratic controls which exist in a public school system which would not exist there if the schools were privately owned.

**Mr. Newman:** One minute left.

**Mr. Wentworth:** Mr. Shanker, if you yourself are not the issue in merging the AFT with the National Education Association, certainly one long-standing issue is the AFT's position that the merged organization should itself be affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Is there any negotiability in that AFT position, in the interest of accomplishing the merger, or is that a firm position?

**Mr. Shanker:** Well, both sides have firm positions on this but people who want to achieve an objective find ways of developing compromises.

**Mr. Wentworth:** They haven't so far.

**Mr. Shanker:** We did propose a compromise at our last meeting about ten minutes before the NEA walked out. I hope eventually the talks will resume and there will be room for compromise.

**Mr. Newman:** Thirty seconds left.

**Mr. Spivak:** Mr. Shanker, just what excuse is there for a teachers' strike since the strike affects the innocent children and not others who are involved to such a degree?

**Mr. Shanker:** Every strike affects innocent people, unfortunately. The excuse is that sometimes there is no other alternative. We have had situations where school boards have taken away conditions that have existed for years and have given the teachers no other choice.

**Mr. Newman:** Our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Shanker, for being with us today on Meet the Press.