

STATEMENT OF ALBERT SHANKER  
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TO DEMOCRATIC PARTY TEMPORARY PLATFORM COMMITTEE

The Democratic Party platform for 1980 will be a milestone in the relationship between the Party and its constituency. The platform may very well be the last place the majority of American voters who consider themselves Democrats have to express their anger with and disagreement over the policies that elected party leaders are pursuing. Over the years, the Democratic party has represented the hopes of that vast majority of our citizens who work for wages. The Democratic party is the party of Social Security, Workers Compensation, Unemployment Insurance, the National Labor Relations Act, the Elementary and Secondary and Higher Education Acts. It is the party that put into place the social structure of our society. Much of what has been done for the people was accomplished in more difficult times than these. The Depression and World War II did not deter the Democratic party from pursuing its traditional goals of ever greater opportunity for the American people. Now, however, the traditional compact between the party and its constituency is in doubt. This platform can be the first step in the cementing of that relationship into an even stronger bond, one that will carry the party to victory in November.

There is no issue facing the Democratic party more important, that is, than the state of our economy. Every program that the party advocates, from National Health Insurance to an adequate defense, depends upon an economy that produces enough jobs at living wages for all of our citizens. Without jobs and the tax revenues they produce, the Party and its leaders are being forced to make impossible choices between urgent domestic and military programs as they currently agonize over the Congressional Budget Resolution. The result is a public debacle that plays into the hands of those who have never believed in aiding the neediest in our society and who will use this disunity among Democrats in Congress as a weapon against all of us in the Fall. Inflation is the Number One enemy of the American people but using unemployment to fight inflation is a discredited tactic that is guaranteed to make every problem facing us more difficult to solve.

The AFT proposes that the following planks be included in the 1980 Democratic Party Platform:

Education

The first three years of the current Democratic administration saw an attempt to re-establish education as a major priority of the federal government. Even the creation of a federal education department can be interpreted by those of us who opposed it as an attempt to do something positive for education. Now, however, in the grip of trying to out Reagan the Republicans, the Administration is proposing cutbacks in education on a scale that only compares with those of Republican administrations during the last decade. To complete the agenda set forth in the 1960's for Full Funding of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Impact Aid, Vocational Education and other important programs that provide aid to

our elementary and secondary education systems, the Democratic platform should advocate an increase of federal aid to education. Unfortunately, some federal education programs have caused as many or more problems than they have solved. This is usually because state and local education agencies are required by federal mandates to provide special educational services but not provided with adequate federal aid to help achieve the required results. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, is a prominent example. The platform should include language to the effect that federal mandates must be backed up with federal resources.

In addition, the platform should point out that the "Youth Employment and Education Initiative" proposed by President Carter be given a high priority for action and funding.

No education plank would be complete without some mention of the attempts both in the Congress and in some states to undermine our public education system through gimmicks such as tuition tax credits, vouchers and the latest scheme in Congress which is to offer a Basic Education Opportunity Act Grant to parents who use non-public schools. The public schools are one of our most valuable institutions. They have provided the means to a better life for hundreds of millions of Americans. They have contributed to the most productive and prosperous society ever to exist on this earth and with proper support they will continue to be the cornerstone of a just and democratic society.

Higher Education. We believe that the structure of federal aid for higher education must be overhauled in a way that will help stem rapidly rising tuition costs. The current federal aid structure contains virtually no cost controls. Increases in federal student assistance are rapidly absorbed by increased tuitions. Ironically, this condition is exacerbated by inequities in the existing programs which result in most aid going to high-cost public institutions, even though a large majority of students in need of financial assistance attend lower-cost public institutions. Changes initiated by the Congress in the proposal to raise the so-called "half-cost" lid on the BEOG's program up to 70% are encouraging. This lid should be removed in its entirety with the full cost of a college education eligible for a BEOG grant. This should be done prior to raising the maximum BEOG's grant any further. Such a step would begin the process of putting pressure on tuition costs and equalizing expenditures between public and private schools.

Early Childhood Education and Daycare. The platform should note that a major gap still exists in our education system. The need for a comprehensive early childhood education program persists. Research shows that educational problems are more easily dealt with during the early years. In addition the increasing number of working mothers makes it imperative that quality day-care programs be established.

#### Labor

The AFT urges a prompt reform of the National Labor Relations Act to make the Act's protection more enforceable and timely. Under the current regulations an unscrupulous employer can utilize delaying tactics and avoid bargaining

with its employees to subvert the law. The law should also be amended to eliminate Section 14b, which permits unequal application of the law at the state level, and to include equal picketing rights for construction workers.

The AFT strongly urges that the National Labor Relations Act be amended to provide coverage for all public sector employees. The collective bargaining process is a cornerstone for our democracy. Extension of that right to the public sector is consistent with an expansion of democratic principles. In the long run, NLRA coverage will enhance labor-management relations in the public sector. An equalization of employee-employer rights will produce agreement, rather than vesting all weapons on the management side of the table. Even in states that now provide for public employee collective bargaining, the laws almost never treat employers and employees as equal partners. This has the effect of encouraging employer recalcitrance and producing conflict.

Extending NLRA coverage to the public sector would eliminate the existing hodge-podge of conflicting laws that have resulted in teachers in adjoining states to receiving completely unequal treatment. The time has come for this federal public employee collective bargaining law to pass.

Other problems exist for education under our current laws. In higher education the Supreme Court has handed down an extremely anti-labor ruling which defines faculty members at private colleges as management employees who are not protected by our federal labor laws. The disastrous ruling in the Yeshiva University Case has the potential to disrupt collective bargaining in other segments of the work force. The Democratic party should reaffirm its stand in favor of permitting collective bargaining for all workers who elect to be represented by a Union.

Still another recent Supreme Court decision has suspended NLRA coverage for lay teachers in church-affiliated schools by invoking the separation of church and state. This decision denies labor protection to almost half a million school personnel. The Supreme Court's continual whittling away at NLRA coverage can be reversed only by legislation and by appointment judges who value human rights to the court.

A final labor law problem educators face is the discriminatory treatment received by tenured college professors under the Age Discrimination Act. The broad spectrum of employees covered under that law cannot be compelled to retire until age 70. Tenured college faculty however are an exception. They do not receive the full protection of this law until 1982. There is no justification for this exemption, except perhaps the relationship between some members of the Senate and college presidents who wish to retire faculty members in order to cut their payroll costs. This law should be changed now.

A Balanced Budget and the Recession. Our economy is now in the grip of a recession, the depths of which may not be fully recognized for some time. Unemployment has already exceeded the Administration's overly optimistic projection. It is clear that the President and Congress are pursuing remedies for inflation that are causing unemployment to rise at a precipitous rate.

The quest for a balanced budget which could be achieved by crippling education and jobs programs, is to talk unrealistic given the increased deficit which will be caused by unemployment. Every 1% in unemployment increases the deficit by \$20-billion. Every 1% in unemployment adds 1 million people to the

food stamp program. Clearly, balancing the budget by cutting back on education and jobs programs is an impossibility.

The AFT proposes for the country's economic recovery the following:

- Re-institution of the Countercyclical Aid program at the level of \$1.5-billion per year. Federally generated unemployment puts the cities in a position of increasing unemployment levels as their tax revenue falls off. Countercyclical aid is a needed step to help urban budgets keep up with need.
- A re-institution of the state component of revenue sharing, 40% of which was spent to aid education. Thirteen states spent all of their revenue sharing dollars on education, using these funds to pay for federal mandated special education programs, among other important educational concerns.
- Passage of an Emergency Public Works Jobs bill. This method of stimulating the private sector has proven valuable over the years. Such a bill is in House-Senate Conference and would become law in order with administrative support.
- Passage of a welfare reform plan that includes fiscal relief to those states that pay the most in welfare costs.
- Tax reform, including a doubling of the excess profits tax. This tax should be made permanent. Outrageous oil company profits cannot be tolerated when most Americans are struggling to pay their energy-related bills.
- Wage, price, profits, rent dividends and interest controls-- no method of controlling inflation is more likely to work than a system of across-the-board controls used for as long as it takes to cool inflation off.

The Democratic Party platform must reflect the hopes of the Democratic constituency even when the party member in government seems bent upon following the policies they campaigned against.

The AFT offers this testimony as an indication of what really 600,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, college professors and health professionals believe is necessary.

I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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June 12, 1980