



NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON

GUEST SPEAKER:

ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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INTRODUCTION

... Chairman of the Speaker's Committee of the National Press Club. Before introducing our guest speaker, I'd like to have you meet some of our distinguished guests at the head table. First, on my left, Mr. Thomas Donahue, Assistant to the President of AFL-CIO. On my right, Mr. Robert Porter, Secretary-Treasurer, American Federation of Teachers Union. On my left, Mr. Francis Silby, Executive Council Member of the Postal Workers Union. On my right, Mr. Al Zack, Director of Public Relations Department, AFL-CIO. On my left, Mr. Don Slaiman, Deputy Director, AFL-CIO, (excuse me--on my right--), Department of Organization. On my left, Mr. Steve Wiltrum, Labor Reporter, McGraw-Hill News. On my right, Mr. Jim Hyatt, Labor Reporter, Wall Street Journal.

I can thank Kenneth Schiebel, President of the Press Club, for putting me on to this tough assignment of introducing our very distinguished speakers today, but really, when I think of it, that's not quite as tough as, for example, being spokesman for Secretary of State Kissinger.

I was at a party the other night when another high-level State Department official asked me whether I knew why Dr. Kissinger's spokesman is like a mushroom. Now this is cleaned up a little for a family audience, but anyway, I said no and he said, "Well, he's kept in the dark, periodically he has fertilizer poured on him, and eventually he's canned."

Our distinguished speaker today was born on New York's lower East Side 46 years ago. He was graduated from the University of Illinois with honors in philosophy and began teaching junior high school math in New York in 1952. That same year he joined a teacher's union and began what has become an outstanding labor career, capped by his

election as Vice President, AFL-CIO, the first teacher to win such honor and as President of a 400,000-member plus American Federation of Teachers. Incidentally, this beats teaching math in the Blackboard Jungle. I understand his various union jobs pay him \$83,000 a year plus expenses. But when I say "capped" I don't want to sound as if this is anything but temporary. In fact, it is said that our speaker yearns one day to succeed George Meany as biggest of the big labor potentates. In fact, the story goes that when George caught him looking over his shoulder one day and said, "Now remember, mister, Gladstone formed his last cabinet when he was 34." Mr. Meany, of course, is 80.

Our speaker is still studying philosophy. His critics say that he is spending too much time on Machiavelli and Nietzsche and not enough time on Saint Augustine and Saint Francis. You know--too much on man and superman and not enough on des quelocque des (?)

Other critics also say that he's interested maybe too much in power, and, as a matter of fact, he is quoted as having said once "Power is a good thing. It is better than powerlessness." And that, of course, also illustrates why you can't argue with the guy.

I remember that Woody Allen (I am told--I have not seen the movie, but in *Sleeper*, one of his recent movies)...he acted the part of a survivor of a nuclear war and someone came up and asked him, "How did this thing get started?" and Woody is supposed to say, "Some guy called Albert Shanker got ahold of an atomic bomb."

But my personal criticism of our guest speaker is that he is competition. He writes a weekly column, "Where We Stand" with his

picture and all, that runs in the Sunday New York Times. Actually, I wanted to tell Punch Salzberger (?) that I enjoy it more than I do some of his other columns. But, I think Punch probably enjoys it more, too, because he gets paid \$100,000 a year for that ad.

Ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, I'd like to present that advocate of teacher power, Mr. Albert Shanker.

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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I guess I should ask for an invitation back here, because I'm going to go ahead with my remarks, then I'd like to come back to respond to the introduction.

The last few weeks here in Washington the concentration has been on conferences and summits and mini-summits on questions of inflation and questions of unemployment. These are being explored by economists, labor leaders, experts in fields of health and education and welfare and I would like to spend the time that I have discussing some of the impact of the current problems with inflation and unemployment on the schools of our country, some of the...and then go to some of the proposals which the American Federation of Teachers and I are advancing as solutions to these problems and then to indicate what some of the implications are in terms of what is about to happen with teachers and their organizations and their activities as a result of these problems which they see and as a result of the programs which they are offering as solutions.

Now, I'd like to just pinpoint several of these problems of inflation and unemployment as they hit the world of education in particular. First, I'd like to point out that for the first time since the depression of the 1930s, we have what is a so-called "surplus" of teachers. Of course, during the '30s it was not unusual that many people, not being able to get jobs, spent a long time in college and then, we still have teachers in New York City who remember, for instance, that they waited 8 years before there was an opening in the school system and they waited during

that period of time. As a matter of fact, there was a group in the 1930s called The Unemployed Teachers Association. It was one of the largest organized groups in the city. Well, we now have across the country over 250,000 people who have been educated and have been prepared to go into teaching careers and who now find they're unable to get into the profession for which they prepared.

Furthermore, Mr. Gallup took a poll recently and he found that at the present time, there are one and one-half million students enrolled in colleges who state that it is their intention to become teachers and that they are preparing for teaching as an occupation. I'm not talking about elementary and secondary teaching where there are now approximately two million teachers employed.

Now, the problem is complicated by a number of other factors. We have the usual turnover of teachers which has existed for many years with people coming into teaching and then finding that they would leave after 2 or 3 years. And the reason for that was that, first of all, there were other jobs to go to, and that's not true during this period of recession and depression. There's no other place for them to go so they're staying.

Then there is the impact of unionization on teachers. There is no longer the greater attractiveness of other jobs now that unions have improved salaries and working conditions within the school system. And we also have within the school system the fact that there is a declining birth rate and that in each year of the next 10 years we already know that there will be fewer and fewer students in school.

So that we have colleges producing a large number of teachers. We no longer have an exodus of teachers to other jobs. We have a declining number of students within a school, and to add to all these problems with the general recession outside and with also, as a result of relaxed international relations, at least as the government sees it, a shutdown of a large number of war industries; we have a large number of scientists, engineers, mathematicians, technicians who were previously in other industries who are now trying to come into the field of teaching. So that we have an employment problem--or an unemployment problem--for the first time. This is not the kind of problem which exists in other fields. When teachers are unemployed, they generally do not just stay home. They don't collect unemployment insurance because for the most part they're not covered by it; but essentially what is happening is the teachers are accepting other jobs at lower level qualifications--middle management and other jobs in industry--and then the middle management people are accepting still other jobs, and the general result, of course, is the 5.4...5 to 6 percent unemployment. What happens is that each educated--more educated--group takes a position at a lower level resulting in a massive push-out of the people of lower skills at the bottom, and then you get your massive unemployment rates in some areas and in some age groups and in some ethnic groups of as high as 50 percent.

Now, the second point that I'd like to mention in terms of impact of the inflation and unemployment on the education role at the present time has to do with the money problem. The government's policy in

terms of tight money and high interest rates. That is, of course, felt in the private sector and construction is practically stopped. It's almost impossible for any middle-income person to purchase a home these days, but the effect on city and state governments and the effect on school systems has been devastating.

You know that most school systems in this country do not receive state aid from the state authorities or federal aid from the United States government at exactly the time they need it. They don't start getting their money on Labor Day when school opens and they don't get it in convenient weekly or monthly installments. And if they are to utilize this money, and they're to have programs that last through an entire school year, they have to borrow the money at the beginning of the year and then pay back when the federal and state governments pay that money to the school districts.

Now, once upon a time--a year or two or three years ago--it used to be possible for school districts and for cities and for state governments to issue short-term notes at rates like 4 percent and 4-1/2 percent and in the course of one single year as a result of the interest policies of our government that short-term money has gone from 4 percent to 8 percent. Now, I do not have a national figure on what that is costing school systems around the country, but I can tell you that one city in the United States--the city of New York--is spending this year alone, \$170 million in interest on short-term money as a result of this increase in rates. And, if you then move across the country, and ask how much is

in Philadelphia and in Chicago and in Los Angeles and in San Francisco and in St. Louis, in Milwaukee, the amount of money that could ordinarily be allocated for smaller class size, for early childhood education, for other programs within the schools, that is now being eaten up by interest, is staggering to the imagination.

Now, the third point that I'd like to make here is that the effect of this combination of inflation and unemployment is having, within the the schools...one of the effects it is having is that is wiping out the effects of a large number of very good, valuable, affirmative-action programs which were started some years ago. And, again, I will cite just one of these. In 1966 and 1967, thousands of school para-professional teacher-helpers were employed in school districts throughout the country to work within classrooms to help to mark papers and to help hang coats up and to help children with reading problems in small groups. Almost all of these para-professionals were welfare mothers--unemployed, high school dropouts. As a result of these programs, thousands--hundreds of thousands--across the country went back to school, received high school diplomas--in New York City, it's ten thousand--not only received high school diplomas but then, as a result of union negotiated contracts, were admitted into college and, at the present time, we have six thousand in the city of New York (para-professionals) enrolled in college programs and two thousand of them will be graduated from college this following year--ready to become teachers. Now, here's an outstanding program, mainly black and Puerto Rican, welfare mothers in 1966 and 1967 who have gone to

college, who are about to graduate. There will be no teaching jobs for them and as a result of the fact that federal aid to education programs have not kept pace with inflation, thousands who are enrolled and who are on the way to becoming teachers in future years, are now threatened with unemployment and are threatened with lay-offs.

Now, I could go on with a long list of how...of the kind of effect this has had. Now, this is a period in which this problem of so-called "unemployment" and surplus of personnel within the educational world tangles in two different directions. We can face, within our sector, this great unemployment and stagnation, or we can use this opportunity of the personnel available to change direction within our school system and to provide services which have always been needed but which we were never able to provide; and we were not able to provide them because from World War II until the present time, the problem that the public schools of America face--the fact that more and more students were entering school each year--we have to be concerned with raising the money to build buildings and we had to literally snatch teachers from the college classrooms and bring them in before the children, to start teaching immediately because we needed enough bodies to stand in front of those classrooms because of the vast teacher shortage. Every one of our cities in the late 1940s and the 1950s and throughout the 1960s on the opening day of school, the headlines in each city were--300, 500, 800, 1,000, 2,000 More Teachers Needed--Failed to Show Up.

Now, the result of that shortage of teachers was very grave. It meant we were compelled to lower standards. It meant that we were

compelled to employ people who had not been properly trained and educated. It meant that we were not able to reduce class size. It meant that we were not able to do many things and I now want to point to three top priority program items--things that we should have been doing a long time ago, which we will now be able to do because of the availability of both space and personnel.

First, is the development of a national program of early childhood education. We have within our country so many who are on welfare, so many who are unemployed, so many who are not skilled, so many who are illiterate. Why? Well, the answer to that is not a simple one. It is... These are problems faced by every nation on the face of the earth. The one thing that we generally do know is that the longer you wait and the older a person becomes the more difficult it is to intervene, the more difficult it is to bring about success and we know through the writings and research of Benjamin Bloom at the University of Chicago and others, that more than half of the intellectual development of children takes place between the ages of 2-1/2 and 5, before children enter school, and if they have a rich, relatively rich, intellectual environment at home and in the community, those children make it and if they do not have such an intellectually and culturally and socially rich environment in the community and at home, they don't make it.

And so, we have an opportunity here to intervene, to enter the lives of children when they're learning words, at a time when they're learning numbers, at a time when concepts are developing. We have a time to intervene before it's too late. Now, this is a program which

we have been pressing for for a long period of time, but until this moment it was not a realistic one because people would say, "How can you demand that we start educating 17 million youngsters who are under 5 years of age within this country when you can't even find enough teachers for the regular elementary, junior and senior high school programs that are in effect right now?"

Let me go on to a second point. A second characteristic of our school systems is that teachers, among all the professionals within our society, are probably unique in the one respect that they go immediately from a purely theoretical academic background within the college or university and are put right into the job without any real intensive on-the-job training and without what is the equivalent for doctors, let's say, of an internship program, where after receiving the theoretical knowledge in college, the person then spends one or two or three years working with experienced practitioners in the field in order to get the practical know-how within the classroom and within the school. Now, there is no question that everyone of us who has been a student in school, knows that there are teachers who have techniques and who have methods and who have ways; and that these ways can be learned, and can be picked up by other teachers provided that they have the time to share with those who are more experienced and so the second program that we are advocating is that in the future, no person becomes certified as a teacher or be given full charge of the classroom until they have gone through a program similar to what a medical student goes through at the end of medical school in terms of internship.

Now, a third program that I'd like to suggest here. Now that we have all these college-graduated, educated people waiting around, looking for positions in teaching and we also have within our society, thousands upon thousands of people who perhaps when they were in high school made a foolish mistake; they got in with a group of friends; they decided to drop out at a particular period of time and now they're not earning much money; they're unhappy with their jobs and they're saying to themselves, "If only I had an opportunity to go back and complete my high school and to do something in college or to get these particular technical skills which I could have gotten." If only I could do that I would be glad to do it. Why should we say that each individual within our society has only one chance in life to succeed and that if he makes a single mistake in high school or if he drops out early in college, that's the end and he can never go anywhere else?

And so, what I am suggesting is a program of lifelong education--the right of every worker within our society--maybe at the end of every 7 years--to enjoy a sabbatical. Yes. Sabbaticals that now are enjoyed by teachers and by college professors, that every worker who would want to leave the workplace and go back and improve his skills in education should, every 7 years, be able to go to some institution and should be subsidized for that and the education should be subsidized as well.

A silly idea? Well, we tried it once. It was called the G.I. Bill of Rights. Yes, maybe we did it for a wrong reason. We were afraid that bringing all these G.I.s back after World War II would result in a massive recession and unemployment. But the validity of the program

stands on its own. Here were millions of men who had dropped out at some point in their educational careers, who had gone out into the world, who learned how difficult it was and then came back and they were the most mature generation of college students that this country has ever known. And not only were their individual lives enhanced as a result of the educations that they received, but think of where the country would be today. Think of where we would have gotten our doctors and our computer specialists and our engineers and our businesses in the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s, if the nation had not been wise enough to make that investment in the G.I. Bill of Rights at the end of World War II; and why should we not similarly allow others who later on have decided that they ought to go back.

Now, this is a program which is similar to Medicare in a sense. If we can have Medicare for the body, there is no reason why we should not have a program of Educare for the mind. A program which throughout a person's life says, "You have a right, at the time when you feel that you want to improve yourself, to return to improve your mind as you improve your health when you go to medical institutions."

Now, there is no reason why this should be limited to a worker on sabbatical. Is there any reason why we should not provide for every single person in an institution, whether it be a hospital, or whether it be senior citizens in homes, or whether it be prisons, any institution where a group of people are interested in improving their skills and learning? Now these are programs which we believe we are now capable of because there is the space and there is the personnel.

Now what about budget? What about finance? Isn't this going to mean more spending? Isn't this going to mean greater inflation because we're

spending money for these things instead of tightening our belts, instead of cutting back? How does this relate to the proposed cuts in budget and the \$5 billion gap in the federal budget?

Well, as we sat there in the mini-summits, the thing that was very interesting about why we had to cut the federal budget back by \$5 billion, is that almost an entire page that was given to us by the President's economic advisors was made up of budget items which are the result of our failure as a society to reach millions of people in time to give them the necessary skills to be able to work and to be productive. Billions of dollars, unemployment insurance, Medicaid, food stamps, welfare costs-- over \$25 billion in the federal budget--which represents money the taxpayers are paying and which also means that out there is a large and growing number of people, who, in terms of work and productivity, do not contribute-- not because they don't want to contribute, but because they were not reached in time to be helped.

And so, the particular program that I am talking must be viewed, yes, as an expenditure in the short run. But in the long run the way to reduce the federal budget is to start cutting down on the billions of dollars and the \$25 billion that I've talked about, that goes to helping people who can't work. That \$25 billion represents a small fraction of what is really spent because you've got to add to that the amount spent in state and local budgets which is in addition to the amount in the federal budget and so we suggest that the monies for the programs that we are talking about is essentially an investment which, in the future will enable us to balance

the budget. It is both economical in the long run and certainly, from a point of view of being humane, and considering what happens to human beings in the future it is the only way to go.

Well, the question is, "Where is the money going to come from?" Now, the administration, the President, really has two choices. One of those is the choice that Nixon took, and that is maintain high interest rates and veto all the social legislation and impound funds and cut back on social programs. If President Ford follows in the footsteps of President Nixon with respect to those two programs, then we will continue to have the economic disaster that we have today and we will continue to have inflation and stagnation and unemployment and we will be heading for the greatest depression--largest depression--most devastating--that this nation has ever seen.

But that is not the only direction in which we can go. There is another direction. And that is that we can choose to raise the money through taxation for the social programs that are necessary. We can choose, through taxation, to subsidize interest rates so that we can begin home-building again and so that the cities of our country do not have to spend \$170 million multiplied by other cities in order to borrow short-term funds. And we can at this moment in history, make use of the economic crisis before this country to enact many of the tax reforms that should have been enacted a long time ago. But maybe the arguments that were used by the labor movements and others weren't deemed to be important enough in the past. Today, in order to finance programs like this, and if I were a speaker from another sector, I could give a speech on the need for

national comprehensive health care along the same line in a number of other fields, the monies are there. And basically, what we need is a closing of loopholes with respect to the favored treatments of capital gains as against wage income, excess profits tax, the end of the oil depletion allowance, the end of investment credit taxation. The list is not a new one. It's there. The social needs are obvious. The choice is very clear. In the one case we can have an economic upswing and provide for human needs and in the other case, neglect human needs, increase human tragedy by increased unemployment and poverty.

Now what does all this mean for teachers? These problems are problems that teachers are confronting for the first time within many generations. Teachers have not seen unemployment since the depression. Teachers have also not seen the relationship between their own jobs and their own professions and politics as clearly as they do today. Everyone of the things that I have talked about has a direct political connection. Now up until 2 or 3 years ago teachers were basically divorced from politics. When I used to come to teacher meetings and talk about making political contributions to support candidates, their answer was, "Keep education out of politics." Well, what we have now is the fact that teachers can see that universal early childhood education, federal funding for teacher training, Educare, lifelong education, a tax program which is equitable, the prevention of the reimposition of the unfair wage controls without price controls...all these are political actions and the result is that teachers across the country are amassing funds of millions of dollars and are involving themselves in politics as they never have before. That

is one outcome of our current situation.

And the second outcome is that the teachers are, for the first time, seeing that the problem goes beyond what they can handle with their own school board or with their own superintendent or with their own community, that the answer to problems that teachers face at the local level is with the President of the United States, with the Congress and with the national administration. And teachers here see that even if they were all organized in a single organization, that they would not be strong enough to bring about the necessary reforms and so, as a result of these economic problems, and as a result of these proposals, we find that throughout the country teachers are moving toward affiliation with the AFL-CIO and there is progress at the present time, massive--organized drives because teachers have never been, never felt their vulnerability as they do now. Never have they seen the opportunities to present themselves to create so much good on the one hand and never have they so feared public education. So this is a turning point--a turning point which I believe will bring about massive teacher political involvement both with manpower and money and also a very rapid affiliation of teachers with the AFL-CIO.

Thank you.

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Thank you very much, Mr. Shanker.

Before I ask the first question, I just...for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the procedure here, there are cards at each table and if you desire to ask a question of the speaker, please record it on this card and send it up to me at the head table.

Mr. Shanker, just to begin...we like to start these things with easy questions and I know that you may have run into this before, probably at your convention in Toronto most recently, but this person wants to know when will you help the employment picture by resigning from a couple of your union jobs?

A. SHANKER: Well, I have two jobs and I intend to keep both of them because there is a very close relationship between the two. I might also correct part of the introduction. I don't earn \$83,000. I earn a salary that I'm very happy with, which is \$70,000. This is a correction of the record and also I'm not running for Mr. Meany's job. I hope that he's around for another 80 years.

QUESTION: Does your union have, if you'll pardon the expression, an educational program directed at college-age persons and their families to explain the grim employment picture for would-be teachers?

A. SHANKER: No, because what field would you ask them to go into? I think if we had...we don't know what the employment picture is. The employment picture is going to depend on the elections. It's going to be determined by the complexion of Congress and by who is President of the United States and by what policies are followed. And if you get the

same set of policies that Nixon followed, you may as well tell people not to go to college at all or to go to high school because they are all going to be unemployed anyway.

On the other hand, if we do get an upswing in the economy and if we get a change in these policies then there is absolutely no reason to tell them not to go into teaching.

QUESTION: My child is studying to be a teacher. Will there be a job when she graduates? (She doesn't say what age her child is.)

A. SHANKER: Well, there will be if we're successful in adopting some of the programs that I've talked about. There are others that I haven't talked about, for instance the shameful neglect of handicapped children, and the beginnings now of a federal commitment in that direction. And there are quite a number of other programs where we've done nothing. In most states, a handicapped child is just left at home and isn't really given anything that can be called an education at all. We're talking about very large numbers of children.

Again, I would not advise people not to go into this field. I believe that teachers, I believe that the labor movement is going to be successful. I think that the general acceptance now of the idea that the last 5 years of policies of the government were wrong--that they brought us to where we are now--that those policies have to be changed and part of that change is to change the two basic features that have been characteristic of the Nixon administration and one is the tight money policy and the other is the policy of cutting back on social programs.

QUESTION: When will they include languages starting from the kindergarten?

A. SHANKER: Well some school districts do; some of them have. I know quite a few school districts that used to start it in the first grade and that's one of the first things that went with inflation. They started cutting back and that's one of the programs that disappeared. So that again, we're talking about the availability of money. I think many school districts would like to do it. We're talking about personnel and we're talking about money. The personnel is now there. The money has been cut back and that's been going. Again, that's part of the same conflict in terms of whether we're going to have adequate money for education and it's not a question of...I don't know of anybody who is against teaching a foreign language and starting early enough. It's a budget question and it's a part of this whole package.

QUESTION: Helen Wies, recent president of the National Education Association told this club that teachers would elect the next president of the United States. Do you agree? If so, who will it be?

A. SHANKER: Well, I think that her statement was both unwise and incorrect. I would hate to live in a democratic society where one group of people with their interests were able to determine the entire government of that society. I think teachers of this country want a voice. They have been voiceless, but they don't want to be dictators. And if teachers were ever in a position where they could name the president of the United States, I think the people of the country ought to figure out a way of changing the laws in such a way to see to it that other people had a

chance to decide who is the president of the United States as well. That isn't what I seek and I don't think it is what teachers seek. I think the fact that teachers have been out of involvement has been said. It's been bad for education; it's been bad for the country. I think we will now have a voice. It will not mean that we will get everything that we want.

As a matter of fact, if teachers were that powerful, we wouldn't need any allies or any friends, so I think that the unwisdom of Miss Weis' statement (sorry, I didn't mean that)...is obviously shown the fact that even if three million teachers were together in one organization-- hopefully that will happen, and not yet--but even if they were, how could three million teachers determine who would be the next president of the United States when a 15 million labor movement can't determine that? Sometimes it's on the winning side and sometimes it's on the losing side. You can make an effort and you can try to do the right thing, but no single group within our society makes that determination and I think that's good.

QUESTION: Why haven't the American Federation of Teachers and NEA merged? Would the Federation agree to work with NEA to arrange a national referendum of teachers and which organization would represent them? Is there a possibility of rapport between the AFT and NEA?

A. SHANKER: Let me just comment on the merger question. I think that given the problems that I have talked about and many that I have not talked about such as the continuing threat of vouchers and the privatization of education, I think that it would be very wise for the teachers of this

country to stop wasting their money on jurisdictional disputes and to merge into a single organization.

Now, unfortunately, people do not always do the intelligent thing. Our society is full of examples of industries and unions and professional groups where any outsider sitting by the sidelines could have told them what the intelligent thing to do was, but they were so busy having a good time fighting each other that that was it. Some of them fight through an entire scenario where when it's all over, there's nothing left worth fighting over. I hope that that doesn't happen to teachers, but at the present time, I would say that the merger was not possible because there is no leadership on the National Education Association side with whom it is possible to discuss merger. Mr. Herndon is a new executive secretary of the organization. He was elected by a margin of a single vote on a 120-plus member executive board. He's new. If I were in his position, I would not want to alienate one or two or three votes on a board where I was elected by a margin of one.

Mr. Harris is president but they still have a limitation of term of office, so as each day goes by, his term comes to an end. Next July, the NEA will, for the first time under a new constitution, elect a president in the sense that we know it...that is, who will be elected for 2 years and who can succeed himself or herself for another 2 and still for a third 2. And I hope that someone there gets elected with a huge majority--a majority of such that they are in a position to sit down and make some compromises. Right now, there is no one in the NEA who is in that position. Everyone is lining up to be that first real president

who can serve for at least 6 years and anyone who sits down and makes any concessions or any compromises is going to be called a sell-out artist and is going to be politically destroyed in the process.

Now what I'm describing is not a problem today. It's a problem for the NEA. When the union started negotiating some years ago in New York City, I was part of a union negotiating team where there were three people on the team who were running against each other for office. Well, I'll tell you the truth--none of us could negotiate. The first person who would be willing to accept 50 gold balls the size of the earth from the employer would be deemed a sell-out artist by the other two for making the first concession.

Now at the present time the NEA has been in that position and we just have to wait for them to pull themselves together and then we'll sit down and talk again.

QUESTION: As a recognized advocate and leader of teacher-power, I'd like to ask, as teachers become more politically active, isn't there a danger that this would spill over into the classroom?

A. SHANKER: Well, the only way you can get a teacher who doesn't have some interests that might spill over into the classroom is to have a dead teacher. Teachers are affiliated with one or another religious group and always have been, or they are irreligious, in which case that could spill over. They may have some shares on the stock market. They can have all sorts of interests and I would hope that teachers would be able to divorce their activities as citizens, as homeowners, as Catholics, as Protestants, as Jews, as members of certain national groups, et cetera. I would hope

that they would be able to divorce those interests from what it is that they do in the classroom: I think that, for the most part, they do.

QUESTION: I have heard it said that those who determine educational policy in the United States (and if you can identify those, we'd like to know) do not want everyone to be educated because then it would not be possible to distinguish between the educators and the riffraff, also that upper middle class people will not support any system in which their children are not guaranteed to turn out upper middle class. Please comment.

A. SHANKER: Well, that's the New Left rewriting of history and they've rewritten the history in the United States and they've rewritten the history of the recent farm policy and the cold war and they've also rewritten the history of the school system. And I think they're crazy. And I also think that they've done great disservice to American public education. Their theory is that the public schools are essentially a conspiracy and the function of public schools is not to educate children but to brand them and to keep them in their place and to get them to accept it. That's what these writers say, that the children of the rich are elevated and the children of the middle class are taught to be middle class and the children of the poor are taught that they're stupid and that they can't learn.

Well, I would just point out one massive piece of evidence which shows that it isn't so--and that is called the United States of America, where we all started with a vast wilderness and a lot of people who didn't read or write English and who didn't count, and I think that the public

schools did more than keep people in their place. I think that they did give educational opportunity. It was not always equal educational opportunity. It still isn't equal educational opportunity, but certainly it was much closer to the ideal of providing mobility in education for everyone than it was closer to the ideal of keeping people in their places, because otherwise you can't explain how we got where we are and the nature of this whole country and the nature of productivity in our education and the massive mobility that has taken place with millions of people who started at the bottom, moving up to the top and the middle, and some who were on top, moving down to the bottom. It's just one of these very simple conspiracy theories that somebody is supposed to be manipulating everything. I would say that if that's what American public schools are really designed to do then someone should be fired because we've done a very bad job of keeping people in their place.

QUESTION: Do you believe in incentive pay for teachers? Do you support merit pay for teachers? That is, should truly effective teachers be paid more?

A. SHANKER: Well, no. Effective teachers shouldn't be paid more, if you have ineffective teachers, they shouldn't be teaching. It's like saying, "Do you think that a good doctor should be paid more than one who's incompetent?" Well, you know, if you have an incompetent doctor, he shouldn't be practicing because he's probably killing people.

Well, let me respond in a slightly different way. I think that inferior...if you had a pretty good machine or other measuring device to prove that some people were more productive and much better than others,

that probably no matter what teachers or other organizations would say, you would probably develop some system of pay which would be greater for the superior.

The problem is that we do not have any such measurements--that all the research which has been done on this shows that there is great disagreement--that when 10 people walk in to observe a teacher, that it may be that their evaluation of that teacher may be much more related to who he or she reminds him of than what the actual teaching is.

Furthermore, I do not think that incentive pay would improve people's teaching, any more than paying me more money to sing would improve my singing. I can assure you that whenever I sing, I do it as well as I can and if you pay me more I will not sing any better. And I assure you that every teacher in the United States teaches as well as he or she can for a very simple reason--because if they don't teach as well as they can, they're immediately punished by the children in front of them. Children can be...they really take it out on a teacher who does not teach well and those teachers who aren't teaching well--it's not because they are lazy; it's not because they don't want to; it's because they don't know how, because they haven't been given the proper help and that goes back to the points that I raised with respect to a practical internship program. Reducing someone's salary isn't going to tell them or show them how it is to talk and how it is to inquire and how it is to plan and how it is to arrange and what techniques one uses to teach children. The only thing that reducing the salary would do is compel that teacher to go out and look for a second job after school in order to meet his payments on his

home and would probably make him a worse teacher.

What you've got to do if you've got somebody who is not performing well is to share with that person some of the good techniques that others are using. Now, of course, after you've finished helping all teachers, you will find some who just weren't helped by all that and in teaching, as in other fields, there are a certain number of people who should not be with us. There is universal recognition of that, but merit pay and incentives are just not the answer.

QUESTION: Will you explain your strong opposition to minority quotas in the teaching profession? (This goes back to your battle of 1968 in N.Y.)

A. SHANKER: Well, that doesn't go back to 1968 at all, but it's true that I believe very strongly in affirmative action by which I mean that we ought to seek out minority groups; we ought to encourage them to go to college; we ought to get rid of those admission requirements which are not relevant but maintain those requirements which are and then we ought to give help within college. We have such a program, as I indicated, with para-professionals. So we believe in finding people and in giving them help and in making sure that they do graduate and that they all grow into the profession.

Now, a quota to me simply means that you fill a certain number of positions by people of given ethnic qualifications without the qualifications to fill the job and I think that quotas are essentially racist. I believe that Blacks and Puerto Ricans and Chicanos and everybody else, given the proper help, can meet precisely the object of requirements that are set whether it be in teaching or in medicine or law or in any other field.

And I do not believe that we should have a society in which there are two sets of standards--one for black doctors and one for white doctors, one for white teachers and another one for Puerto Rican teachers, one for one group of engineers and another for another group of engineers and I think that if you believe that a quota should be established with lower qualifications for another group, that essentially you are saying that this other group is not educable, can't meet the same standards, is inherently inferior and therefore, because you can't overcome the inferiority through education, through training, through help, through compensatory programs, therefore, in order to see to it that they have enough seats in that profession or occupation, you're going to create two sets of standards. I think it's a horrible thing. I think in the long run it will mean that minority groups who achieve positions will be viewed as being inferior. They will not be equal. The bachelor's degree and the teaching profession and the M.D. and the law degree will not mean the same thing--if the people in our country believe that they were awarded on the basis of color or ethnicity and not on the basis of meeting certain standards which are true for everybody.

I believe that anyone who believes both in equality and integration has to make the sacrifices that are necessary. See, I think it's a lot easier for our government to say to a certain number of Blacks, "Here is a teaching certificate. Here is a doctor's degree. Here is a law degree," not worrying about whether they are going to be able to function and what the rest of society is going to think about their qualifications. It is a lot cheaper to give somebody a piece of paper called a degree

than it is to go out there and spend thousands of dollars helping them to actually qualify so that they meet the standards and they really are equal--not in the sense of holding a piece of paper but in the sense of actually having the ability. And I believe in really giving the ability and in really helping, whatever it costs, and not in merely giving a piece of paper, which seems to make the problem go away but it just reappears right at the other end.

QUESTION: May we have your opinion on the weaknesses and strengths of decentralization of urban school systems?

A. SHANKER: Well, in the first place, it ought to be very clear that decentralization has nothing to do with education--that when a teacher walks into a classroom and there are children in that classroom and there are textbooks and blackboards and everything else, that basically what goes on in that classroom has absolutely nothing to do with whether the board of education is downtown in one place or whether there are three boards of education or whether there are 32 district offices. It's got nothing to do with it. I can assure you that reading and mathematics and social studies and everything else--that the same problems, the same curriculum--everything is the same, regardless. The only thing that changes is who's picture is on the wall or where the forms go or where the reports go.

So decentralization is essentially a political process. A process of political involvement. And if it is to be defended, it should be defended on the basis that it increases local participation in the governance structure of education as against having a central system.

Now the problem with it is that it does not really increase local governance for a very simple reason, and I give New York as an example. We now have 32 school boards and each of these 32 school boards...next May we will be electing nine members of each of 32 school boards so we have almost 300 people who will be elected to office and since all of them have opposition, we will have approximately 900 people running against each other in 32 districts.

Now these districts do not have community newspapers. They do not have their own radio station. They do not have television stations. They do not have their own fire balls and library socials that you have in a small town. Now I live in a small town where we elect a board of education. I know every member of the board of education. There are three newspapers in that town. Everything that every member of the board of education says is reported the day after he says it. We have a volunteer fire department. There are two social occasions for that and one for the local library which is supported in that way. We know exactly who is running.

In the city of New York, how much space do you think CBS, NBC, ABC, the New York Times, the Daily News, the New York Post-- how much exposure do you think these 900 candidates for public office have? The answer is practically none. The New York Times has had the best coverage on this and they have one piece about that size on each district. That's 32 articles. That's a lot of space. They didn't do it for all 32. They did it for those districts where there were problems, but still...I'll tell you what happened. So you are a citizen and you've got to go out and vote for nine people out of 30 or 27 who are running in your district.

You have no way of knowing who those nine people are because there has been no communication. By the way, it's a nonpaying job, so none of these people are going to put on any blitz campaigns. They've got no contributors who are giving money to them. It's a voluntary job which they are running for. (That's another problem. Who do you think runs for a nonpaying job where no one knows the existence of the job

_____?) All right, so the problem is the only people who participate in these elections are well organized groups who have self-interest at stake.

Who are those groups? Local anti-poverty agencies who would like to take over a school system because it becomes part of a job program. The teacher's union--because it wants to make sure its union is enforced. A Catholic church group--because they want to be in a good position to negotiate with the community school board as to its percentage of funds from Title I that go to parochial schools in that district.

And what happens is that each organized group gives a list of people to its constituents and they go out and they vote blindly. In the first decentralization election, 15 percent of the people in the city of New York voted. In the second one, 9 percent voted. In the third one, I predict that it will go down to about 6 or 7 percent.

So what we have is something that has no educational effect. It's designed to bring about political participation. The net of the political participation is about 6 percent of the people who vote. The only ones who vote are people who have a direct political stake in it. Nobody else knows what it's about. Meanwhile, you have 32 bureaucracies, instead of

one, to deal with. And if you think it's easier to go to one of these 32 little offices than it is to deal with a central bureaucracy, you have not had experience in bureaucracies. You're always better off talking to the guy who is on television--the mayor--than you are talking to somebody that nobody knows in some little district office.

QUESTION: Mr. Shanker, you are known as a favorite of George Meany and this questioner would like to ask, "How long will Mr. Meany stay as president of AFL-CIO? Who will succeed him? Would you like to succeed him or his successor?"

A. SHANKER: Any other interesting questions?

I don't know if I'm a favorite. If I am everybody else that...I think that part of the basis of Mr. Meany's power is that he doesn't show favorites and if he did, he would not be able to hold the labor movement together, which is a voluntary organization. Anybody can get in and out when they want to and they stay in precisely because they don't feel that they are being disfavored and it isn't operated that way.

Now, I hope that he stays in an awful long time and it looks like he will. He's in great shape. I do not have any such aspirations. I do not know anyone else who is running for the office and I guess people in the past who thought they were aren't around any more and George is still going strong, so I'll leave it at that.

QUESTION: About tenure: When should a teacher have tenure?

A. SHANKER: I think teachers wait too long now. In most places it takes them about 3 years. I think that probably one year is sufficient. Most other jobs--30 to 90 days when a person is on a job and they're

deemed to be satisfactory--they're given some form of job security. Now I think the problem with this notion of tenure is that most people think that once somebody has tenure, you can never get rid of them. That is just not true. It just means that after they have tenure, the principal or the superintendent has to show if there is a reason for getting rid of a person.

Now, what is that reason? Well, the principal has to say, "I visited that teacher eight times during the last year. On the first occasion I saw the following things that were wrong and I suggested that he or she make the following corrections. On the second visit I saw that these corrections were not made so I again made certain suggestions. On the third visit I found that two of these things had been corrected but that new problems cropped up. In the fourth situation, I was walking along and happened to find that the teacher did so and so which is terrible, unprofessional, outrageous, et cetera." And then the principal puts all these things together and no judge in his right mind is going to take the teacher's word against the principal's. He's going to say, "The principal is hired to manage that school and I am going to take his word for it."

Now, the reason that tenure has such a reputation is that most principals do not do an adequate job of helping teachers, of constructively criticizing, of visiting. What happens is that a teacher has been in a school for 15 years. Every year of that 15 years the principal has said, "This teacher is fine." And then one day that principal has an argument with the teacher in the hall because she refuses to cover a lunch-duty assignment or refuses to walk across to a supermarket to see to it that

children aren't stealing. She doesn't want to give up her lunch hour. And then the principal yells out, "You're fired. You're incompetent." And then, of course, we have a very easy job pointing out that the teacher was very satisfactory for 15 years and that this was not a professional judgement of the principal's but it was merely an emotional outburst in terms of his authority.

So that I think that all people on a job should have job security relatively early and it doesn't mean that you can't get rid of them later. It just means that you have to have a reason for getting rid of them and it means that they have their day in court. They have due process. They have a fair procedure and I think everyone ought to be entitled to that.

QUESTION: Before asking the last question, Mr. Shanker, I would like to present to you the National Press Club's Certificate of Appreciation awarded in recognition of meritorious service to correspondents of press, radio and television in the nation's capital.

One more presento. This is the National Press Club's warm-up jacket and I understand you like to take walks in the wood. It may come in handy on a chilly morning. Wear it in health.

A. SHANKER: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Now for the final question. Is the American Federation of Teachers responsible in any way for the fact that teachers today are much younger and more attractive than when I was in elementary school?

A. SHANKER: Well, that question shows that there is certainly great faith in teacher power and also in the union movement, to be able to bring about these great dramatic changes. It may also be that your

memory is wrong. It may be that your judgement has improved as the years have gone on and that when you were sitting there as a student, you didn't have full appreciation of that teacher who was up there in that classroom. Maybe we ought to take out some of those old pictures of the teachers who were there.

I want to thank you for this opportunity. I do want to close by going back to the first question which is a question of two jobs. I want to point out that most union leaders in this country of national organizations are engaged in negotiating the master contract in their industry. Now many of these industries are national industries so that naturally the head of the...

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