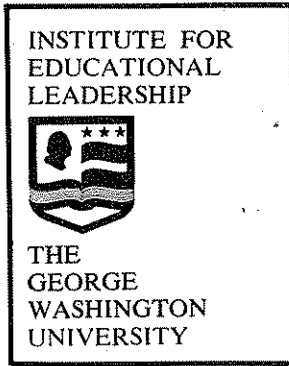


"Teacher Power"

A Transcript of "Options on Education"

January 17, 1975



KEY: A: Announcer Mike Waters
JM: Moderator John Merrow
Harris: James Harris, President,
National Education Association
Shanker: Albert Shanker, President,
American Federation of Teachers

A: From National Public Radio in Washington,
I'm Mike Waters with "Options on Education."

(Music-"Solidarity Forever")

Shanker: In other words, Mr. Harris says that if
the AFT members are willing to raise the
white flag and capitulate that we would be
welcomed into their organization. Now
that's the position they've taken all along;
it's a reasonable position for him to take.
I would take the same one with respect to
your capitulating and coming into the AFT
but after we've gotten over flagwaving I
think we ought to sit down and work out
reasonable compromises.

Harris: I would think it would be tremendously
humorous to have an organization of
1,600,000 change its policies in order to
join an organization with a membership of
425,000, and it would be highly reasonable
for your organization to change its rules
to join ours, since half of your members are
already members of our organization.

Shanker: Well, as the hundreds of thousands of teachers
join the ranks of the unemployed, I don't
think that they will see anything humorous
at all in the notion that there ought to be
compromise and not capitulation when there's
a merger. * * *

A: There are 2,429,257 public school teachers
in the United States and the men whose
voices you just heard represent 1.8 million
of them. Albert Shanker, the President
of the American Federation of Teachers, and
James Harris, the President of the National
Education Association, are two of the most
powerful leaders in American public educa-
tion. Their organizations are bitter rivals,
engaged in a struggle for dominance of the
teacher union movement. Until this "Options
on Education" program, the two presidents
had never publicly discussed their views
on the teacher surplus, on their national
priorities, and on the difference between
the two unions. For this program they
discussed these and other issues with John
Merrow of the Institute for Educational
Leadership. We're calling this edition
"Teacher Power."

This is a complete transcript of one program in the award-winning "Options on Education" series, which is co-produced by the Institute for Educational Leadership of The George Washington University and National Public Radio. The series can be heard over most of NPR's 176 member stations from coast to coast. "Options on Education" is also rebroadcast around the world over Voice of America. For a free program schedule or transcripts of previous programs (50¢ each), write to: "Options on Education," 1001 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

- JM: I think it'd be interesting to find out how you both got to be at the pinnacle of American teacher unionism. How did you get into it in the first place?
- Harris: Since I was going to make a career of teaching, I wanted to be very much involved in the Association that was going to affect my well being, and after having become the NEA director for a period of time in Iowa, it was suggested that I run for President, and so I find myself in this situation.
- JM: How did you get from Kansas City, Kansas, to Iowa?
- Harris: Well, my home was in Iowa; at the time that I started teaching Iowa was not hiring black teachers, and Kansas City, Kansas, had a segregated school system and so I could go there and get employment. From there I went to Oklahoma and taught at the University and from Oklahoma then I took advantage of a chance to come back to Des Moines and teach in that school system.
- JM: Mr. Shanker, how about you? How did you get from being a sixth grade math teacher to the top of the AFT?
- Shanker: I started teaching in 1952 in New York City, sort of accidentally. I was doing graduate work at Columbia University. My field was philosophy and I ran out of patience with my doctoral dissertation and also ran out of money and decided that I would teach for just a little while. My mother had been a union member from the time she came to this country in 1912. She was a garment worker. My parents were both very pro-union. So, I believed very strongly that when you've got problems at the work place, the thing you have to do is form a union and fight and struggle.
- JM: Let's talk about the problems in the work place. Either one. Mr. Shanker?
- Shanker: Well, in the first place, if we think about the low salaries. The average teacher's salary in this country is right now somewhere between \$11,000 and \$12,000, but if you were just to take the teachers who are in the bottom 25 percent or bottom one-third, there are plenty of teachers in this country who are earning \$6,200, \$6,500, \$6,800, \$7,000 a year.
- Harris: I would contend that teachers are not paid enough today and based on a different kind of criteria. I think that school systems find it tremendously difficult to hold many of their teachers. The best teachers can be siphoned off by industry at will. And I think when that is true it's an indication that the school systems are not paying teachers enough that they can have a single job and feel that they are earning an adequate living for their family.
- Shanker: I wouldn't even go with the market analogy in this case. It has been true for the last 25 years that we have been losing teachers to industry, but now that we've got this horrible recession, we're getting it the other way around. There are a lot of people from industry who are being laid off and they're all coming--you've got thousands of engineers who've come back to teaching in the last few years and you may have many other skilled people who'll be looking for jobs in the public sector

in the near future. That doesn't mean that teaching is paying very well now; it's just that people would rather be employed than unemployed. But when you look at what others make after comparable training, those who've been to college for five or six years, you will not find another skilled occupation where people start, for instance, at the kinds of salaries that they start at in teaching, where it takes them 14 to--maybe in some cases with longevity bonuses--up to 35 years to reach maximum.

JM: But you won't find another profession where you only have to work 180 days a year. You won't find another profession where you get out at 3:30 p.m. Those are common complaints about teachers.

Shanker: Yes, they are common complaints by people who don't bother to think for five minutes. Now, the same mother who'll walk through a school building and look at a teacher and say, "Look at that teacher sitting there" or "....leaving school at 3 o'clock, that's terrible, they work a short day." That mother isn't thinking about the last time she had her four youngsters home on Saturday. I'll tell you, one of the best things that ever happened to us is that during a strike that we had in New York City in 1967, Mayor John Lindsay--remember him--he asked parents to volunteer to be "scabs" in schools, and there were a couple of thousand parents who came in. That lasted a few hours. That was one of the best educational programs ever conducted in terms of how difficult the teaching job is. If you view a teacher's job more in the way you would view, at least partly, a performer, a stage performer, who's got to maintain presence, who, if you do something wrong, you lose your audience. And the audience didn't pay to come and they're not there voluntarily, and you've got many problems. If you have a class of 30 and you've got one or two children who are having great problems because their parents are unemployed or one or two of them come without breakfast in the morning and they can't possibly listen. Or a few of them have been to school for five or six years and they still can't read and write and they resent being there and they act out, they're somewhat violent. Whom do you turn to? Well, how many of our school systems have adequate services? How many of our school systems can even take care of a child who has got a normal virus and is out for two weeks, and in how many cases does that child have someone to come back to and say, "Look, here's the work I missed, I'd like help for an hour or two"? It's an extremely tough situation and a very tense situation and those from the outside who are criticizing about how easy the job looks, haven't tried it.

JM: Let's move back to the question of a surplus of teachers out of work and people returning to teaching. That's come up, you've hinted at it a couple of time. Now it's more than 100,000 teachers, I assume, and it's growing all the time.

Harris: I'd like to respond to that. It certainly is not a surplus of teachers but an under-utilization of teachers. And if teachers were used to the extent that they ought to be to make any kind of reasonable approach to this business of adequately staffing classrooms and providing courses that have been eliminated, providing kindergartens where they don't exist, providing a preschool program where none has been established, etc., we would find that there is a teacher shortage even within this country.

JM: But are you saying there is a surplus of teachers or not? I'm not.....

Shanker: There are teachers who are now underemployed. There are very few teachers who are actually not working. But what's happening is that people who trained to be teachers are not teaching because we are not providing the conditions that should be provided. One of the very gratifying things about what's happened with teachers is that they've come to realize that their own problems are closely related to what happens in the economy and international affairs and all other institutions; teachers are becoming very heavily involved politically, because if we don't turn the economy around, with more and more unemployed, there will also be more and more unemployed teachers. It's not only a bad thing for the teachers but that means larger class sizes and fewer guidance counselors. It means a further deterioration of the conditions that both Jim and I have described here.

JM: I want to come back to that question of political activity but it seems to me that when there are 100,000 certified teachers who can't find teaching jobs, who have to work somewhere else in the economy, or not work at all, to call that "underutilization" can't be much comfort to those teachers.

Shanker: Sure, it's underutilization.

Harris: The point I wanted to make was this: it is not a matter of 'providing comfort'; it is a matter of what was suggested should follow as a result of identifying the problem. I think if we use the term 'teacher surplus' it suggests that not enough teachers are being used as teachers, and I think that's the point. It puts the problem for dealing with it on someone else. In the first instance, it would suggest that those people who are in teacher training ought to train for something else. And the second case, it suggests that those people who are in the business of hiring teachers and staffing classrooms, etc., ought to direct their attention to doing a better job on that.

JM: To spending more money and hiring more teachers? Let's talk about the immediate impact of the underutilization or oversupply. That's what I'm concerned about, because there are 100,000 certified teachers who aren't teaching.

Harris: There's an impact upon what happens to the child in schools. I'm of the opinion that we could very easily produce an entire generation of disadvantaged youngsters, because they cannot pick up after having dropped out and having their education disrupted and so forth by our responses to the economic situation, by our responses to these cutbacks, and so on, someday and make up for all that has been missed. Most of them will not make up. Many of those who manage to stay in school still are not properly trained and cannot earn a living as a result of this experience that they've had, and so I'm of the opinion that we would actually produce a generation of disadvantaged youngsters using some of the current practices that we are using.

JM: There's a continuing decline in public support for education.

Harris: I'm not sure that your assessment of the public attitude toward teachers is accurate. There have been...

JM: I didn't say toward teachers, I just said toward public education.

Harris: That's teachers.

- JM: Well, the Gallup Poll each year shows increasing concern among the public about issues of violence in schools, about vandalism and it shows, I think, decreasing support for public education. That's reflected then when people vote on bond issues.
- Shanker: I don't agree with that. I mean, sure they show concern over violence. So do teachers; I don't know of anyone who's more concerned with these problems in the schools than the people who have to live in them--the teachers and the students. I don't think that voting down bond and tax issues is an indication of poor support for public schools. If you had to vote on taxes in this country the way we vote for school taxes, we wouldn't have a country left. If you had a vote as to whether to have taxes for the Army, for the Navy, for the CIA, for the Department of Agriculture; I can't think of a single program--let's think of welfare programs, social security, help for medical research--I don't know what kind of thing you can get people to say "yes, I want to pay money." These school votes are the only place where citizens can turn out and express their resentment, not against the schools, but against all taxes. I think that's part of what we're being hit with.
- JM: I've heard that plenty of times; of course I'm sure there is some truth to it, that people are taking out their other resentments when they vote down bond issues. But it's also true that there's a general level of discontent--there are questions being raised all the time about productivity, about accountability, "how do we know what we're getting," and discontent over rising costs. That's what I meant.
- Harris: This is a comment, not just upon schools, it's a comment upon the commitment by the general public for education in general, and I would hope that people were even more aware. In fact, we're engaged in a program in order to raise the awareness level of the public of the extent to which schools are failing, because we know that a large part of that is due to precisely the kind of thing that I mentioned, that the public just is not supporting education to the level that would allow teachers to be as good as they know they could be and schools to be as good as teachers are capable of making them, if they had adequate support. I would hope that when they really got a true picture and when they got as concerned as they ought to be, then they would take some steps to improve it.
- Shanker: I want to take issue with the idea that the schools are failing. I don't believe that they are. As a matter of fact, I think that some of the discontent which is there is due to the very success of the schools. Now, when I was growing up as a child (and I'm 46 years old, so that will date me, although I don't consider myself an old man) but when I was growing up, to have been a high school graduate during that period of time was, well, people thought of a high school graduate as being a very well educated person. But what we've got to look this is against the historical backdrop of the last 50 years and we've got to say that the schools have not failed them. Let me say one other thing about all this criticism: my parents wouldn't criticize the schools because they never had an opportunity to go to school and they looked at the teacher on a pedestal and they worshipped the school and the teacher. Now the reasons we've got so much criticism of schools today is that we've been successful enough to turn out millions of college graduates

who feel that they are the equals of teachers and anybody in the school system. And that creates more problems for us, because they're able and willing to criticize us. But let's take that as a mark of success and not as a mark of failure.

Harris: Now, my point is simply this: schools are failing to a far greater degree than this nation can afford. When we see that the dropout rate across the country is 23 percent, that's one thing. But when we take a close look at it we see that 80 percent of some groups are failing, failing to graduate from high school. Sixty percent of the children of Indian parents, 80 percent of the children of migrant parents, over 50 percent of the children in some of the rural areas of the South and in major cities of our country today. And I insist that--and by the way some people see this as a racial matter but three-fourths of all of the dropouts are white--but I insist that we must express the same kind of concern when 80 percent of one group fails to graduate as if it were 80 percent of some other group. Welfare rolls are growing at an alarming rate. These aren't college graduates who are building up these statistics. These are people who will be a burden on society for the remainder of their lives because schools have failed to a far greater degree than we can afford to let them fail.

Shanker: I think that in a way we've come closer to agreement on this than anything else.

JM: It seems like there's a kind of contradiction almost, as if you're looking at a half full glass of water or half empty glass of water and expressing a satisfaction with education.

Shanker: No, I'm not satisfied at all. It's just that I want to put the view that "schools are failing" in perspective. Because if people believe the schools are failing, I think there will be less and less commitment. I think that we are failing with millions, and I think that Jim's point, that the concentration of failure in certain groups is absolutely intolerable in a democratic society, is absolutely right. Something has to be done, but I think that we're only going to get people to be willing to do something if they realize that it isn't hopeless--that the money that they put into education has been a good investment. You never encourage people to improve things by saying "look at all that we've done and failed." Especially when it isn't true. It hasn't failed.

Harris: I feel a bit ridiculous having to make this same point again, but I will. That is that education, of course, is not failing for the majority of our young people. The majority of our young people are getting a better education than young people have at any point in our history in the past. But it's failing a much larger percent than we can afford to have fail as a nation. And to run around and talk about what a tremendous job we are doing would cause people to have a lethargy that we cannot afford.

A: Albert Shanker and James Harris agree on some things. Like the difficult responsibility of teaching well. But they disagree about the effectiveness of today's public schools. In fact, they disagree about a good deal more, as we will hear.

Shanker: There's no question that before teachers act militantly today, just in trying to hold their own, they think twice and three times. I think that the unemployment among teachers will have a further depressing effect on the economic position of teachers unless we change the direction that our country is going in and get away from the Ford/Nixon policies and turn the whole direction of the economy around.

- JM: But can you, in your wildest dreams, imagine turning the whole economy around? Now, you were quoted recently as saying that soon there might be one unemployed teacher for every employed one. Can you, in your wildest dreams, imagine a situation in which almost all of those teachers in fact would be doing what they were trained to do? I mean the birth rate is down, there aren't enough two to five year olds to...
- Shanker: I can imagine turning the whole economy around because teachers are not in this alone. We in the AFT are in a group called the AFL-CIO, and construction people are out of work and the auto industry is down and practically every industry that you look at...
- JM: You say you can imagine turning things around with a kind of political solidarity with other workers?
- Shanker: Yes, there are millions of people in this country who are getting together on a political program and who essentially said "no" to Nixon and Ford in the last election, and they're going to say "no" in this Congress, and if Ford doesn't move quickly on this, you've got a massive labor base which is heavily involved in political action that's going to change the administration of this country to bring new policies.
- JM: Let's go on to that question of the political activity of teachers. I know that both Mr. Harris' NEA and Mr. Shanker's AFT are heavily involved politically. The Nixon administration consistently saw both the NEA and the AFT as "enemies"; the support that both unions have given has been to the Democrats by and large.
- Harris: I think it is unfortunate if anybody, including the administration, would view our activities and our efforts to improve education as being detrimental to anybody; the government would have to be extremely shortsighted.
- JM: Well, maybe we have an extremely shortsighted government, but isn't it a fact that, if you yourselves weren't on the White House's "enemies" list, certainly people from both the NEA and the AFT were on that "enemies" list and the administration support for education dropped. Isn't that in some way a consequence of their perception of you and your organizations?
- Shanker: No, I think it's a consequence of a stupid policy on the part of the Nixon administration. We aren't married to any political party. And a good number of Democrats who thought that we were wedded to them came to us either for financial support or for endorsements or something else didn't get it because they weren't particularly good when it came to the issues that we were concerned with. Now it's true that this last year there were more Democrats than Republicans. I'd say that the answer to the Republicans is they ought to take a look at these issues which defeated so many of them, and they ought to change. They ought to come to us and say "here's what we stand for in education, it's what you stand for" and then we'll support them.
- Harris: I have concern when I find that any legislator is anti-education. Certainly when an administration is anti-education and the kinds of statements that have been made even by Mr. Ford in the short period of time (that he feels that education is being adequately supported) would indicate to me that he's not really aware of the downhill trend that we have in so many places. But it's certainly not a pro-Democrat, anti-Republican kind of posture.

- Shanker: I want to differ with Jim just a little bit here; I agree basically on the orientation, but I think it's not enough for teachers to support candidates who are pro-education. There are a limited number of education bills that come up each year and I certainly would want candidates who would be supported by us to be people who had the right record on those bills. But I think that teachers have to be just as concerned with what those particular people did in other bills. Because how they voted on the price controls, how they voted on a trade bill, how they vote on labor legislation which affects the private sector, how they vote on health care legislation, how they vote on a whole series of economic issues affects teachers just as much as Federal aid to education. It's our job as the leaders of teachers' organizations to do an educational job with our own members; to tell them that if they are concerned with politicians and with legislation that is only in the educational domain, then they're cutting their own throats. We haven't done very much for ourselves.
- Harris: I would like to respond to that in simply this way: I think it would be tremendously unrealistic for us to present ourselves as the saviors of the nation and be able to exercise that kind of influence in all areas, and I think the degree to which we're differing represents, or reflects somewhat, the orientation of our organizations. Ours, an education association, being education-oriented with no other organization over the top of it, is free to deal with educational issues and educational issues alone, and leave the labor matters to labor and not have to have our decisions entail the various aspects that an organization that had a labor orientation would have to consider.
- Shanker: These other things aren't just labor matters. There's nothing that's more important to the teachers of Michigan today than the tremendous unemployment in the auto industry. The unemployed are the people who pay the taxes to support the school systems. Essentially, what I'm saying is that teachers can't do it alone. Sure, there are 3,000,000 teachers in this country that are not very well organized yet. They're not fully organized. But even if 3,000,000 teachers were organized, we would not be strong enough to do for ourselves what we have to do. And unless we are together with these other groups saying "Look, we will help you get back to work, because if you're not back to work then there isn't very much that we can do to keep American public education alive." I think this is a very basic difference. But I don't think, you see, that you can do for teachers and for children and for public schools, I don't think you can do them justice unless you also take care some of the underlying problems. Otherwise you're just scratching the surface.
- JM: Maybe we should move to that question right now (we seem to have fallen into it) about essential differences between the two Organizations. What are they? Since merger talk has been going on and off for the last several years now, what are some of the essential differences between the two groups?
- Harris: We see two or three basic differences in our organizations. Number one, I would point out that our goals are essentially the same; ours we consider to be a little more balanced, we are concerned with teacher welfare and the improvement of instruction and have traditionally launched a pretty much balanced program as we attempt to improve the two areas that are our concern.

Our organization has been one that has traditionally kept the controlling influence with the membership.

JM: Are you saying power is decentralized in the NEA and centralized in the AFT?

Harris: I think that could be a fairly accurate description. Our power is in our governing bodies and...

Shanker: Where do you think ours is?

Harris: Well, traditionally the union concept has been one where the vast amount of power is vested in the few leaders who are at the top, who can use various means in order to maintain that power and the membership finds themselves...

Shanker: Are you going to run for reelection?

Harris: Yes, I'm going to run for reelection.

Shanker: Well, what do you call that except trying to maintain your power?

Harris: I think that it's the manner in which the membership feels that they can influence that decision, votes would be carried out with a secret ballot election.

JM: Is that the same as in the AFT--the secret ballot?

Harris: It's my understanding that that is not the same.

Shanker: Well, we have our conventions the same as the Republican and Democratic parties. You see, we feel that when locals send their delegates--and usually pay their expenses--to go to a national convention, that they have a right to know how their delegates voted. I think that we're just kidding ourselves when we say that that's the difference.

JM: Well, what are the differences then, from your perspective?

Shanker: I'd say that the major difference is a difference that we have already talked about and aired here. And that is that the NEA calls itself an independent, professional organization. It is independent, by which it means that it's alone, it's isolated. It does not have the support of 15,000,000 other organized people who basically have the same problem. Now, when teachers have problems in their communities, they've got to negotiate with their board of education. Or if it comes to the extreme and they have to go out on strike, they usually can't make it alone. They need help, they need friends. Well, where are you going to get that help? From the Chamber of Commerce? Hardly. The National Association of Manufacturers? Probably not. The American Medical Association? I doubt it very much. Well, you go down that list and when you're all finished, you'll find that the only people who really understand your problems during a time like that are other people who have been through precisely the same experience. In other words, other people who are in unions.

JM: So, the essential difference then is your union's affiliation with the AFL-CIO?

Shanker: The essential difference is that the NEA has the support of its own 1.3 million members and those teachers who are in the AFL-CIO have the support of 15 million. Now, as any good organizational person knows, having 15 million support you is a lot stronger than having 1 million. That's why each of our organizations tries to get more members. Because in size there is strength,

when you've got greater size. There's no question about it, that with any national issue--you take the whole wage-freeze question--whose picture was on the front page of Time and Newsweek and every paper in the country? Was it mine? No. Was it Jim Harris? No. Was it the executive secretary of the NEA? No. There was one man whose picture was on the front page all across the country, because he doesn't represent teachers and he doesn't represent bricklayers or autoworkers. That was George Meany. He represents the mass of organized workers in this country. And if you're not inside that group, you're relatively powerless.

Harris: Now, my response to that is simply this: we certainly are not alone. We are in a coalition arrangement with other public employee groups. We advocate that this is an ideal arrangement...

JM: A coalition?

Harris: Yes, it allows the organization to maintain its integrity as an organization representing the particular segment that is charged. And it means that when you...

JM: Let me fill in the audience here. When you say the coalition, you're talking about CAPE. Explain a little bit about what that is.

Harris: CAPE is the Coalition of Public Employees, other public employee groups. It includes AFSCME which is headed by Mr. Jerry Wurf; it includes other public employee groups...

JM: AFSCME. That is the American Federation of State, Municipal and County Employees?

Harris: Right, it includes...

Shanker: Well, they're in the AFL-CIO, right?

Harris: Very definitely.

Shanker: So they must have a reason for believing that they are strengthened by being in the AFL-CIO?

Harris: Well, there are some organizations, there are other labor groups who feel that it is not desirable. The point that I would simply make is this: that when there are issues such as those we've described, whether they're economic or whatever, that are good for the nation, and we all believe in them, then a coalition allows us to work together. And I might point out that Mr. Shanker's organization has traditionally opposed such coalition arrangements.

Shanker: I'd like to make three points. First place, the notion that you're only free if you're outside of a group like the AFL-CIO is obviously erroneous, since groups inside are free to make their own decisions. As you could see in 1972, some of them supported Nixon, some of them supported McGovern, some of them remained neutral, so that obviously there was nobody who was in a position to tell each of the affiliated groups what they should do.

JM: Those that supported McGovern, it seems to me, got themselves in a peck of trouble.

Shanker: No, not any more than those who supported Nixon. I think everybody got into trouble because they couldn't pull themselves together. Basically, here, I think that the worst thing about CAPE and the public employees coalition, is that if you've got public employees getting together saying what we want is more for the teachers, more for the policemen, more for the firemen, more for the state-county-municipal workers, more for this group, more for that group, and you put together all those groups who live off of the taxes of taxpayers, and we say we are going to be saying "gimme, gimme, gimme, we're interested in ourselves, we're not interested in the autoworker or the farm worker or the steelworker or the construction worker, we're not interested in all the people who pay the taxes to make our jobs, we're going to get together to see to it that we get more and raise their taxes and we're not going to lift our fingers in the halls of Congress or with the President or in state legislatures to help those people to get back to work to help their economic conditions," you know what we're going to be doing? We are going to unite the ordinary people of this country who work for a living and who pay our salaries against us because of our own selfishness. Because the worst thing you can possibly have is public employees in their own organizations saying "we're only interested in ourselves and the taxpayer can be damned because all we're going to do is build a coalition of public employees against the public." It's the worst thing that could happen.

JM: So you're saying that, as far as the AFT goes, that public and private employees ought to be together in a labor movement. Let me see if I understand the territory here. We have the NEA and the AFT. Now, some people belong to both. Mr. Shanker is one. So, there are the two teacher unions. Now, the AFT is a part of the AFL-CIO; the NEA is part of a coalition called 'CAPE' and the largest member of CAPE is the American Federation of State, Municipal and County Employees, which is also part of AFL-CIO.

Shanker: No, the largest member of CAPE is the NEA.

JM: Oh, I'm sorry, the largest member of CAPE is the NEA. But AFSCME is also a member of CAPE, and it, too, is a part of the AFL-CIO. So, we get a bit circular. But there are still some very basic differences.

Harris: I think probably as we consider this business of structure, etc., it would do well for us to ask ourselves "what do most of the teachers of this country prefer as an organizational arrangement?" I would point out that once a year we empty our membership rolls and the teachers in fact have a chance to vote as they sign up for which organization they feel comes closest to being the one that they would like to have membership in. Mr. Shanker's organization rallies somewhere around 425,000 votes, and this year we rallied something like 1,600,000 votes. I think that we are concerned with these matters when we're also concerned with how the teachers feel.

Shanker: We rallied 15,000,000 votes along with the rest of the labor movement.

JM: Which organization stands to benefit more if a merger between the NEA and the AFT became a reality?

Shanker: Neither one; if there were a merger, both organizations would be out of existence and a brand-new one would be formed. But I'll tell you who stands to benefit. Two groups at least: one are the children and the other are the teachers.

- JM: Why the kids?
- Shanker: Because there's only...kids come and go and they don't vote and they're not politically organized, and the only groups who can fight for them are parents and teachers. Parents tend to come and go also. By and large, I'd say with very few exceptions, the things that teachers have been fighting for both through collective bargaining and through legislation are improvements that help not only the teacher but also help the schools and help the children.
- JM: Are you saying there'd be less squabbling and therefore more attention on education? I don't follow your line of reasoning.
- Shanker: Well, right now, a good deal of the energy and money of both organizations goes to jurisdictional warfare; that's natural because each organization feels that it will be more effective when it's larger, and the way to get larger is to organize more people, and some of the people we organize are those who are not organized at all and some of them are those who've already been organized by the other side. But, aside from that, whenever you have rival organizations, the name of the game is who gets the credit. And the way to make certain you get the credit is that generally, you support things that are different from what the other group supports. It's terrific when you go to a state legislature or Congress and you have two major organizations and each is moving in a different direction, and the Congress says "Well, the two of you fellows can work it out. We won't give either of you anything." But I think the most important thing to see is that half the teachers in the country don't belong to either organization. I think the experience of New York State is quite instructive. When we merged the two organizations, within a period of two years were able to organize an additional 40,000 teachers who never belonged to anything. They said, "Gee, this is exciting; it's terrific." They read all the articles in the paper about how powerful teachers were becoming and how influential, and they joined, and I think that a national merger would have the same effect on all the teachers who are not organized. I think that they'd come in very, very quickly.
- JM: Mr. Harris?
- Harris: I would agree that students and teachers would benefit. I feel that teachers ought to be together in one organization and I would suggest, Mr. Shanker, that we ought to put them together into one organization and allow those unresolved issues to be submitted to a nationwide referendum. Let's get on with the business that we say we are about as teachers and leaders.
- JM: I've heard several times that one of the obstacles to merger negotiations is the "charismatic" Albert Shanker.
- Harris: That's an obstacle?
- JM: That's what I've heard, that there's a great fear in the NEA that Mr. Shanker would ultimately take over. Mr. Shanker, do you want to admit to being charismatic?
- Shanker: I think that there are charismatic people in both organizations, and besides which charisma as anyone can see in politics is a matter of time and place; it's temporary. And anyone who tries to build a permanent organizational structure on that is doomed to failure. A merged organization would be democratic, the members would decide, it would be large enough and important

enough an organization so that there's be room for everybody. I would hope that in such a merged organization, we wouldn't start carrying on the fights inside the organization that have been carried on between the organizations. Otherwise there wouldn't be much point to putting it together. The whole point to putting it together is to forget those struggles and proceed, instead of fighting each other, to fight the people who are the enemies of education, instead of having one teacher fight another.

JM: Do you feel that, with or without a merger, that a large part of the American public will perceive of teachers as union people more interested in what their work hours are and punching in on the time card and not as professional educators concerned about their children?

Shanker: No, not at all, but I think that the time has long past when they're going to feel sorry for us because we're helpless, powerless people that allow ourselves to be pushed and kicked. There was a lot of pity for us then. A lot of sympathy.

JM: And not much money?

Shanker: And not any money and not any respect, and not any dignity. Now of course, there was a certain shock when all of a sudden the teacher who'd always been kicked around, pushed around, stood up and made a little bit of noise. But they'll get used to that.

JM: It's more than a little bit of noise. I think that's one of the questions, in terms of man/person days lost to strikes since 1967...

Shanker: Negligible.

JM: Why do you say 'negligible'?

Shanker: Well, look at it. You've got 3,000,000 teachers in the country and how many man-days were lost. By the way, every one of those man-days could have been made up if the boards of education who are weeping in their beer about the poor children who lost the time, had wanted the teachers to work on some holidays and some vacations to make up that time; I don't know of a case where the teachers would not have done it. But that same board of education that cried about the poor children losing education when the strike was over, they were much more concerned that the teachers lose their salaries as a result of being out on strike. They weren't concerned with the children making up education, they were concerned with punishing the teachers for being out on strike. I think that's an issue that the American public ought to be aware of.

JM: Now, you say it's negligible but in fact it's in the last three years, since 71-72, just those three years, it's well over 2,000,000 person days and that, by the way, is well over half of the strike days lost among all public employees in the country.

Shanker: That's about 2/3 of a day for each teacher in the country

which is less than what's lost on a cake sale that takes place in most schools. It's less than what is lost when they decide to have a special parents' program: It's less than what's lost when there's a snow day, a religious holiday.

- JM: Look, we understand that argument, but it's also true that that is over half the time lost by public employees in the country.
- Harris: The point I would like to make along this line is the kind of improvement that result from actions of that nature. In my opinion, it is an excellent investment and I think that when things deteriorate to the extent that teachers find no other way after exercising everything else at their disposal but to take some type of dramatic action to call attention to a situation that must be improved, this is time well spent.
- Shanker: I'm rather shocked about the attitude toward the freedom of teachers within this country. Teachers can strike in Canada, they can strike in England, and in France and in Israel and in every free nation in the world. This is the only free nation in the world that I know of there a teacher gets fined and goes to jail for going on a strike where no one is killed as a result of the strike and no one's health is lost. Sure it's an inconvenience but name a strike that isn't an inconvenience. Every strike cuts off some kind of service.
- JM: In the case of children isn't it more than a case of inconvenience?
- Shanker: No. it's an inconvenience, unless I suppose a strike lasted more than a year and the time period....
- JM: How about say 30 days?
- Shanker: Well a 30-day strike, certainly that time could be made up during the rest of the educational life of that child.
- JM: Let's say 100 days?
- Shanker: A hundred days could also, but you could get to a point where it couldn't be made up and then you'd have to ask questions as to how do you provide fairness to the employees, because even in a situation where irreparable harm is done you don't just let the employer decide what the salary and working conditions are. You still have to provide some sort of fairness in that situation. I think here we're very close to a threshold. I believe that there will be national collective bargaining legislation and I think finally teachers and other public employees will have the democratic rights which other workers have enjoyed for so many years. There is another major difference between us by the way in that we oppose the idea that supervisors and teachers should be in the same bargaining units. We think that there is a conflict of interest. The AFT doesn't have that problem because we don't represent principals, but the NEA in some states there are still principals in the organizations. In the private sector that's an element of company unionism.
- Harris: It's rather interesting that Mr. Shanker finds this organization so tremendously compatible with all other labor groups,

etc. and yet has the kind of problems that he expressed there. Our position has been that it's a matter for local determination and that in locals where they have had a satisfactory relationship and most of the members feel that they can work together satisfactorily and achieve those things that they want, they take a vote and they abide by the results of that vote. In organizations where they feel contrary then they have their separate groups and so we have both existing within our organization.

- JM: You know throughout this conversation you have talked about a number of differences that exist between the AFT and the NEA....
- Harris: Let me mention one other major difference. May I?
- JM: Sure.
- Harris: Another major difference that we have in our organization that has been the recipient of a great deal of adverse comments from Mr. Shanker personally and from other representatives organizations has to do with the business of affirmative action programs or the use of quotas. In order to guarantee to groups that have been systematically excluded that they would have adequate minimum kinds of representation, we guarantee certain minimums. We feel that this was such an important item to our membership that it was considered one of the three non-negotiable items that we would take to the table when we were discussing merger possibilities, and in the absence of any other system that has worked satisfactorily. We find that while that is not the ultimate and not ideal it does get results.
- JM: That is, having quotas?
- Harris: Right - having a quota system, a minimum number of positions
- JM: Proportional representation?
- Harris: ...and our membership has found this very desirable and...
- JM: So if, for example the student body of a school is 40% black then the faculty should be 40% black?
- Harris: Right, that can be applied to the school, but I was speaking in terms of membership and representation on bodies within our organization, but it certainly could apply to school systems also.
- JM: Mr. Shanker what is your position on that?
- Shanker: Well, I think that the NEA has gone from one form of racism to another. You see, for many years the NEA itself had a racial structure within the organization where its state associations and local affiliates were separate. The NEA said nothing about the Supreme Court decision until ten years after the '54 Supreme Court decision. I might say that both the American Federation of Teachers and the New York Local were amicus in the 1954 Supreme Court case. We've had a strong commitment on affirmative actions in Civil Rights, integration, and without having quotas we (throughout the years and now) have a better percentage of minority groups

on our national executive boards than the NEA does. I think that, however, that it's absolutely disgusting to say that you have to have a fixed percentage, X number of Chicanos, X number of Puerto Ricans, X number of Blacks, X number of Indians.

JM: Mr. Harris?

Harris: I, again, find myself in the unfortunate position of having to respond to ignorance. Mr. Shanker is entirely inaccurate. Nobody is elected to anything without receiving more than 50%.

Shanker: Then you can't guarantee a quota.

Harris: Rather than produce ridiculous situations for the NEA, tell us how representation for the AFT, and I would suggest that your record is not better than the record that has been established by NEA. For example, when has there been a minority person in the position that you hold?

Shanker: Well, there has not been within the AFT, which is a younger organization, but by the way that does not mean...now, well alright now let's say...in your Consitution if you have not had a minority President what is it, in 11 years? Is that the provision in the NEA Consitution?

Harris: That would no longer apply since we have had a minority President.

Shanker: Yeah, but if 11 years went by, let's say....

Harris: That's a one-time proposition.

Shanker: Oh, it's a one-time proposition? In other words, from now on it doesn't make any difference if ever again there's a black President of the NEA. As long as it was done once it's fine?

Harris: This is the third minority that has been elected to the spot, and it's reasonable to assume that it would happen again in the future.

Shanker: Well, it isn't reasonable to assume at all.

Harris: It's not reasonable to assume that in your organization, since it has never happened, and there is no provision to cause it to happen.

Shanker: In the American Federation of Teachers whoever wins the majority of votes is the person who is elected as President, and that's the democratic way of doing it. By the way, affirmative action, when you set up a quota system, you know you can go out and say 20% of the doctors in the country are going to be of this group, and you could say 20% of the nuclear physicists will be of this group, 20% of this will be of this group, that doesn't produce people for these positions. Now I believe in affirmative action, and I've been part of affirmative action programs for many years. As a matter of fact we will have an affirmative action program with paraprofessionals this year. Over 2000.

- JM: How does your affirmative action program work?
- Shanker: Well, you seek out people from groups that are underrepresented and you do give special help in terms of training, in terms of all kinds of things. However, you require that the people either run in regular elections or meet the regular qualifications if they are for jobs. For instance, in the Democratic party I favor the idea that the delegate positions and all others should be advertised in minority group newspapers. It should be a recruitment effort.
- Harris: Mr. Shanker's position caused him to be booed off the floor at the Democratic Convention.
- Shanker: And George Wallace was not booed but I was, and I'm very proud of the fact, and I'm very much ashamed, by the way, that the delegates at the Democratic Convention found that Mr. Wallace was more to their liking than I was, but it doesn't surprise me at all that many of the Southern organizations that had the greatest racial problems are perfectly happy to accept a quota system which keeps minorities in their place, as long as it's a particular place and that's it.
- Harris: It is minimum quota as quotas are, a minimum amount. It certainly does not keep anybody in their place. It means that every individual has a fair opportunity of being represented in positions just as others....
- Shanker: Why should some groups have a minimum guaranteed and not others? And once a guarantee...
- Harris: Because they have been systematically excluded to the extent that it hasn't happened and since it hasn't happened in the past, a positive and affirmative program is better than no program at all.
- Shanker: Then you're not merely providing minimums, you're providing maximums. You're creating a caste system. You're saying that in every school and every teacher organization, on every negotiating committee, and on every executive board you're going to have a fixed system of representation. It's going to be representation by race, religion, and national origin. And I say to you the Constitution of the United States, the great thing about it, and the thing that we're trying to make, is that it should be race-blind, it should be color-blind, it should be religion-blind, it should be blind to all these things. It talks about men. It doesn't talk about this group, and that group getting, this group getting this particular piece of it. What was wrong about racism in this country is that it treated certain groups not as equals, and now what you're trying to do is set up a new system, and not where we're color-blind, but where again people get their positions, or are denied positions on the basis of their color, their race, religion. That's dead wrong. It's un-American, it's un-democratic, and it's un-Constitutional.
- Harris: This country is not color-blind, this country has never been color-blind, and it's unrealistic to expect that it's going to be color-blind at any time in the future.

- Shanker: I don't believe that - I think it's more color-blind that it ever was before and I look forward to the day when it will be.
- Harris: To continue to advocate the kind of philosophy that you're advocating will earn you some more boos in the future, I rather suspect.
- Shanker: I don't mind the boos if they're for the right thing. I was also booed when I was on the picket lines to integrate restaurants and other places in the late 1940's and 1950's. I was booed by racists then, and I'm being booed by racists now, and I'm very proud of it.
- JM: I don't think we're going to solve that question of affirmative action and quotas and so on and so forth. It's obviously a complicated kind of thing. I wonder if some of the arguments that you've just had are negotiable kinds of items. Do either of you expect there to be any closed-door conversations between you and your organizations about merger during this 1975?
- Shanker: There hasn't been really since we've not had "off-and-on" talks. We had them on once, then they were off, and that's it. I hope that the talks will be re-established, but there's no indication at this point that they will be.
- Harris: That's a fairly accurate assessment.
- JM: What would it take to get talks going? Who would have to invite whom? I mean, what's the shape of the table, is it part of the...
- Harris: If Mr. Shanker and other members of his organization that are members of our organization could get themselves to the place where they were ready to abide by the decisions of their parent organization, the NEA, then merger talks would be highly feasible.
- JM: Mr. Shanker.
- Shanker: In other words, Mr. Harris says that if the AFT members are willing to raise the white flag and capitulate, then we would be welcomed into their organization. Now, that's a position they've taken all along. It's a reasonable position for him to take. I would take the same one with respect to your capitulating and coming into the AFT, but after we've gotten over the flag-waving I think we ought to sit down and work out reasonable compromises.
- Harris: I would think it would be tremendously humorous to have an organization of 1,600,000 change its policies in order to join an organization with a membership of 425,000, and it would be highly reasonable for your organization to change your rules to join ours since half of your members are already members of our organization.
- Shanker: Well, as the hundreds of thousands of teachers join the ranks of the unemployed, I don't think that they will see anything humorous at all in the notion that there ought to be compromises and not capitulation when there's merger.
- JM: Ladies and gentlemen, you have not heard a public merger between the NEA and the AFT, but I don't guess anybody expected to.

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- A: As John Merrow indicated, a public agreement on a NEA-AFT merger was not anticipated. In fact, right now, the two unions are battling to represent American teachers in different parts of the country, and particularly in Florida. In that state the NEA affiliate defied the parent organization and voted to merge with the Florida

AFT and are now seeking membership with the National AFT. The NEA outlawed mergers with the AFT after they had occurred in several places, notably with New York State. That explains why the AFT's Albert Shanker is also a member of the NEA. That also explains why the the NEA's 1.6 million members and the AFT's 400,000 add up to only 1.8 million. About 200,000 teachers, mostly in New York, belong to both unions. A full-dress merger between NEA and AFT is apparently not in the cards, at least not for the time being. As you heard, there are basic differences on quotas, affirmative action, on secret ballot elections, and on membership for principals and supervisors. Membership in the AFL-CIO is an AFT requirement, but the NEA prefers a coalition arrangement. In fact, the NEA has joined coalition with another AFL-CIO union, The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, whose head, Jerry Wurf, is a keen rival of Albert Shanker. Collective bargaining is also a sticking point. The AFT wants all public and private employees to be covered under the existing National Labor Relations Act. The NEA wants new legislation to cover all public employees. Since the Congress is going to consider collective bargaining legislation during the session, the NEA and the AFT may find themselves joining forces to push one or the other bill through Congress. We'll be examining the collective bargaining issues in a later "Options on Education" program. Despite charges and counter-charges the NEA and the AFT have a lot in common. Some sort of merger would seem inevitable. When and if the merger does take place, that single teachers' union would attract many of the now unaffiliated teachers. This would create the largest single union in the country.

(Music-"Solidarity Forever")

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If you wish a transcript of this program, send 50 cents to "Options on Education," Room 310, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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