

REMARKS OF CHARLES COGEN
November 7, 1964

The presidency of the U. F. T. was a labor of love, and it was also immensely rewarding for me in friendships, in spiritual and professional growth, and in the realization of so many of my ideals.

As I stand here, memories crowd in on me. Let me share with you a few of the significant moments in which I drew renewed strength from your support and solidarity, and without which I could not have lead the UFT to the heights it has attained.

An Executive Board session in 1962 lasting till 3:00 a.m. while the 43,000 teachers were tied to their radio and TV sets awaiting our decision on obeying an injunction; an all-night vigil in the rain at City Hall; immense rallies at St. Nicks and at Randall's Island; all-night negotiating sessions with the Board of Education; an overflow Spring Conference luncheon - these are among the soulsearching memories of events that tied us together in bonds of brotherhood. No less important was the day-to-day activity of rank and filers and the activity of the many, too numerous to mention, in leadership positions, and the great satisfactions that I experienced in working closely with them.

Only such solidarity and strength could transform a small organization of 2,800 in 1952 to one of 28,000 in 1964. Only such solidarity and strength could bring many thousands of teachers to Randall's Island in the rain; only such solidarity and strength could achieve contract after contract that revolutionized our profession.

Collective bargaining was in 1952 a term outside of our working vocabulary, though some of us did, shortly thereafter, begin to talk about it as an ultimate goal. Today our collective bargaining agreement has won for us the highest esteem of teachers, of the entire labor movement, and of knowledgeable people generally. The

teacher now has a real share in determining the conditions of his work. We have made a new profession out of teaching, with the provision of duty-free lunch periods, elimination of non-teaching chores, and a myriad of other gains in many areas. Above all, as a result of the dramatic events surrounding our collective bargaining experience, the teacher today is a new personality--no longer timid but courageous, no longer passive but dynamic, no longer subservient but dignified and self-respecting.

We have always been a militant organization in general, with recourse to petitions, picketing, rallies, and demonstrations. When it became necessary in 1960 to add the strike as another dimension, we were solidified and strong enough to use it effectively.

Our organization has always been involved, not only in bread-and-butter teacher matters, but also in civic and professional problems. Recent examples of our broadened vista include participation in the civil rights movement, aiding other unions in their fight for a higher minimum wage, joining brother unions on the picket line, and fighting for effective schools.

Above all else, we have worked and lived by the highest ideals. We have aimed for the best educational practices for both the teachers and the children; we have acted with integrity and with dignity; we have valued our union affiliation; we have functioned in the most democratic fashion.

It must never be forgotten that the Teachers Guild played a very significant role as the precursor of the U. F. T., and I owe a deep debt of gratitude for the inspiration that I have drawn from the Guild and from its leaders - Linville, Lefkowitz, Smallheiser, Simonson, and many others whose idealism was the lifeblood of the organization. Also important has been the activist role of the thousands who joined with the Guild to make it the U. F. T.

Now, what does the future hold in store for the UFT? I, as a member of the local, look forward to an ever-increasing membership until we encompass all but the small hard core of non-joiners. We shall soon be free and clear of all indebtedness, and it staggers the imagination to visualize our potentialities as a debt-free organization. We have already moved to more spacious and beautiful headquarters, and we will probably soon be in a building of our own. We will expand our welfare program into insurance, co-op housing, and other new areas.

We will continue to improve our collective bargaining contract indefinitely. During the periods between the signing of new contracts, we expect to make continuous gains through consultation, following the precedent of the effective schools project.

I am hopeful, though by no means certain, that strikes will be unnecessary, as we resolve more and more of our disputes through peaceful channels. Whether or not we will live in a strike-free climate will depend, in the last analysis, on the readiness of the powers that be to support education in New York City in adequate style, and to make necessary changes in working conditions.

But above all, again, we will remain true to the ideals and principles that have given us our special place in the life of the city and the nation. The future of the United Federation of Teachers is in good hands. Having laid down my burden, I am heartened by the realization that you have the manpower, the leadership, the will, and the momentum to go on to new heights of accomplishment.

With your great help, I have, since August, been placed in a position where the national scene of education is my province. The presidency of the AFT is a most demanding job, but it offers many challenges.

Now I am part of a team that is prepared to continue and enlarge the efforts of our predecessors in office to make the AFT the large and influential organization --indeed, the spokesman for American education--that is its destiny. It is a united team, and we are going ahead in full force.

We propose to duplicate throughout the nation what we have succeeded in accomplishing in New York City. In many other cities, too, large and small--in Dearborn, Detroit, Pawtucket, Minneapolis, and many other places--we have made great gains in organization, in collective bargaining, and in improving the educational system.

Our goal is to make collective bargaining the way of life in school systems everywhere, and we have stirred up the entire nation as we seek to achieve this.

Our goals go further than special teacher interests. We aim to have a full impact on the learning conditions of the children. For example, we are taking steps to spread your effective schools plan as a model for other cities throughout the nation. Furthermore, the AFT Executive Council is setting up Educational Councils of AFT members and others, including expert scholars and rank and filers, to make special studies in various areas of professional concern, particularly to union teachers and the students. These areas include, in addition to effective schools, such practical problems as teaching load, supervisor-teacher relationships, teacher certification, and organizational freedom. Education in America is in the doldrums and requires a liberating force. We expect the AFT to be a prime mover in this venture.

We are entitled to look forward to an American education which teacher and student alike will find a rewarding and satisfying experience. This means class size small enough for each individual child to be recognized and treated as an individual instead of part of a mass. This means remedial and other special services

that will keep the backward child from becoming a serious problem to himself, to his teacher, and to society. This means constantly revised and revitalized curricula that will satisfy the needs of the children in their school life, challenge them to make the best use of their talents (at whatever level that may be), and produce the type of adult citizen who will be satisfied with himself and be of optimum use to the society that developed him. This means a supervisor-teacher relationship of mutual respect where each plays his role to make teaching a pleasant service and not an irksome task.

We will, however, fall far short of our goals if we do not get a substantial degree of federal aid to education. Unless our community-based school systems are given federal support in the near future, the fabric of American education is in danger. Furthermore, it will be impossible to remodel our schools to cope with the educational problems of the technological age.

The American Federation of Teachers has made plans to enlist the support of the AFL-CIO and civic, parent, and community groups in an all-out effort to induce Congress to provide federal support during the coming session. AFT locals across the country have been urged to assist in the formation of community federal school support committees. We are seeking to combine, at the local level, in cities and smaller school districts across the country, all those who are interested in the future of education. Our objective is to impress upon the Congressmen and Senators the overwhelming demand for such support.

In our efforts, we cannot afford to be diverted by fruitless controversy over the questions which have prevented the enactment of federal school support legislation in the past. To insist on a resolution of all such issues now would doom our efforts to failure at the outset. If there is sufficient demand for federal school

support, I am confident that a way will be found to provide such support, despite these obstacles.

~~Federal aid was a major issue in the recent national election, due primarily to the efforts of union teachers. Now the voters have emphatically rejected the Goldwater "do-nothing" view. The election was a clear mandate to Congress to pass the necessary legislation.~~

Federal support of community-based education is the fairest and safest way to insure the future of America's children. Direct action by local citizens could have much more impact on congressmen and Senators than the efforts of professional lobbying groups in Washington. Let us all join together to accomplish this long-sought objective during the coming session of Congress,

In order to attain our goals, permit me to repeat, it is essential that we make the AFT the real spokesman for the teaching profession. Toward this end, the Executive Council and the staff have laid out a cooperative organization plan that is comprehensive, finely articulated, and practical. It is based upon effective cooperation among the AFT, the State Federations, area councils, locals, and, finally, and very importantly, the AFL-CIO. This plan is well on its way, and we are making good progress.

All of this national activity is important to you here in New York City. It is a reciprocal relationship, and we strengthen each other. The same is true in regard to our relationship with the rest of the labor movement.

Of course, our spokesmanship for American education will be based on more than membership size. For our basic ideology encompasses, as I have previously indicated, the moral and social principles that entitle us to this role of leadership.

The time is ripe for a new beginning in the teaching profession. We in New York City have done our share in a big way. We must now make our AFT strength

and influence on the national level comparable to that of the UFT and other strong locals on the local level. I look forward to leading, together with our very able Executive Council and Staff, toward achieving this goal.

Need I add that your continued confidence in me is a tremendous spur and support to me? I am, indeed, heartened by today's sign of your esteem. On behalf of Tess and myself, I thank you very much.

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