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Maine Rogers: Thank you. Mary A.

Selden

WHY TEACHERS NEED THE AFL-CIO

By David Selden, Assistant to President

The American Federation of Teachers is one of 130 nationwide unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. We maintain our affiliation for the following reasons:

1. The interests of teachers are closely allied with those of other organized employees.
2. Only organized labor has consistently fought for increased financial support for schools at every level of government.
3. Teachers, in negotiating with boards of education and the superintendents and other administrators who represent them, need a source of strength from outside the educational establishment.
4. The AFL-CIO maintains valuable research and legislative services in Washington, D. C. and in every state capital.
5. Affiliation offers teachers an opportunity to provide leadership outside the educational system.
6. The assistance of the AFL-CIO and the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO^(IUD) in organizing and in winning collective bargaining rights enables the AFT to make gains for teachers.
7. The broad social program of the AFL-CIO merits teacher support.

Voluntary Cooperation is the Basis of the AFL-CIO

Outsiders tend to think of the AFL-CIO as a mysterious, monolithic army. Actually, the AFL-CIO is a confederation of 130 nationwide unions which cooperate voluntarily to provide support and services which they could not provide as well by acting separately. The unions in the AFL-CIO are held together by mutual need and common interest--not compulsion.

Each union governs itself, setting its own policies, chartering local unions in its field, and electing its own officers. Each helps support the extensive

activities of the AFL-CIO by contributing 7¢ a month on behalf of each of its members. Individuals are members of their own unions only and the AFL-CIO does not have a master membership list. It can exercise no control whatever over any member of the affiliated unions.

The AFL-CIO is governed by its biennial convention, to which each union, including the AFT, sends delegates. The Convention sets broad policy guidelines and elects the officers and the Executive Board. On the state level and in most communities there are AFL-CIO ~~city central~~ bodies in which local unions from the various occupations cooperate, and here again the AFT is represented.

Affiliation with state and local AFL-CIO bodies is entirely voluntary. As is the case with the national AFL-CIO, per capita payments are only a few pennies a month. Although the network of AFL-CIO structure is not without internal stress and strain, as is the case with all human institutions, for the most part, the various branches function smoothly.

AFT Democracy

The government of the AFT is simple and direct and well understood by its members - - unlike the complex bureaucracy of the NEA and the state associations. One becomes an AFT member by joining the local union in his school district. New locals are required to have a minimum of ten members. The local is designed to act as a negotiating agent with local school authorities and to provide benefits and services for its members. The AFT emphasis on the functioning local union is in contrast to the NEA stress on individual membership on a nationwide basis.

AFT state federations are based on the local units. They are lobbying, legislative, and organizing mechanisms. They set their own dues and pursue their own statewide programs.

The national AFT is governed by its annual convention. Its Executive Council, composed of a president and 16 vice-presidents, is elected every two years by the convention. The convention lays down broad policy guidelines and the Executive Council meets several times a year to carry on the continuing functions of the union within these policies. Day-to-day business is handled by the AFT President and the staff.

The NEA Fosters Anti-Union Prejudices

In spite of the democratic practices of the AFT and most unions, in one collective bargaining campaign after another the NEA has been harping on anti-labor themes. The NEA writers, admen, and other staff members--in their scramble for teacher votes--distort the truth to play on what they assume to be an underlying anti-labor attitude among teachers. Although they know better, they deliberately picture the labor movement as anti-teacher, anti-education, anti-democratic, and anti-intellectual.

A favorite NEA propaganda device is presenting a sweeping generalization based on an atypical example. The fact that one AFT local has a modified union shop agreement is used to imply that all AFT locals favor such an arrangement, despite the fact that the AFT strongly supports freedom for teachers to join the organizations of their choice. The long and vigorous support of tax measures for education by organized labor is ignored, and the action of a few local and state AFL-CIO bodies who opposed specific regressive and unfair taxes is stressed. The spectre of "union control" is dangled before teachers by references to "labor bosses." A clause in the Preamble of the ^{constitution of the} New York City AFT local, which states cooperation ^{organization,} with organized labor as a purpose of the ~~organized~~, is quoted in large newspaper ads to "prove" that the AFT is subservient to organized labor.

This propaganda is scarcely worth noting. It reveals more about the fears, prejudices, and isolation of the attacker than it does about the practices of the attacked. It cannot withstand the tests of time and truth.

How About an "Independent Union?"

Several philosophical arguments against AFL-CIO affiliation do need discussion, however. Most of these revolve around the idea of reforming the NEA and its satellite associations into a sort of "independent union."

Suppose it were possible to place control of the associations in the hands of the teachers, this line runs. Suppose that the NEA Department of Classroom Teachers were to be given real autonomy and democratic structure, with membership in ~~teachers-only~~ *teacher-controlled* local associations as the foundations. Suppose these local units were the basis of each state association, giving the state classroom teachers association freedom from control by supervisors and administrators. Would AFL-CIO affiliation still be desirable?

If such a supposition has any possibility of realization, it is because of the mounting pressure of the AFT. It could never be accomplished from within the association establishment. If, as some observers hold, "the NEA is becoming more like a union," this uncertain drift toward collective bargaining (professional negotiations) and a no-contract--no-work policy (sanctions) has come as a result of the AFT threat to the NEA corporate empire. It is no secret that the AFT would not have been able to offer this challenge without the assistance of the AFL-CIO, and particularly the IUD. Teachers owe their present opportunity for liberation to the labor movement.

Unionism Strenthens Professionalism;
AFL-CIO Strengthens Unionism

Those who talk about transforming the NEA into an "independent union" usually take the American Medical Association as their model, even though the NEA as presently constituted would not qualify because, while the AMA is an organization of equals, the NEA is built on acceptance of the inequality of its members. However, if it were possible to develop an all-inclusive classroom teacher organization, AFL-CIO affiliation would still be feasible and desirable.

Even the AMA could benefit from ^{closer} contact with other organized groups. The organized doctors have become isolated from the rest of society; teachers should avoid this error. More fundamental, however, doctors in private practice are self-employed, and they do not feel the need for one of the prime functions of a union, collective bargaining. In contrast, teachers are employed in groups. Years of public relations efforts and generalized research, on which the associations have expended much money and effort, have not won for teachers the status to which we are entitled. The most effective way for teachers to establish professional salaries, working conditions, status, and other conditions of employment is through direct negotiation with the boards of education which employ them.

When it comes to collective bargaining, who knows more about it and who stands more committed to its principles than the AFL-CIO? Organized teachers need all the assistance they can get when they bargain with their employers, just like other organized groups of employees.

Employees who work for the public also gain a support dividend from AFL-CIO affiliation which does not pertain to union members working in private industry. The

AFL-CIO is a respected community group in most localities. When the local central labor body endorses teacher demands, the superintendent and the board know that the proposals have public support.

It might be argued that the unions should support teachers' demands anyway, without affiliation. Perhaps. But affiliation gives teachers an access to the leadership of other unions which no unaffiliated union can claim. Occasionally, even union teachers are unable to gain labor support, but unaffiliated organizations are far less successful.

The Common Interests of Employees
are Served by the AFL-CIO

A common argument against affiliation with the AFL-CIO is that teachers "should not align themselves with a single segment of society." This view is apparently based on the assumption that the AFL-CIO is engaged in some sort of class war in which teachers should maintain strict neutrality.

If those who espouse the "segment of society" concept are suggesting that teachers would inject bias into their teaching, this insinuation is as demeaning to the professional competence of teachers as it is without foundation in fact. This same accusation was made against newspaper ^{reporters} ~~reports~~ when they organized, and against printers before them, yet no one would accuse American newspaper of pro-labor bias.

In actuality, many professional groups--newspaper reporters, radio and television broadcasters, engineers, social workers, musicians, actors--have found AFL-CIO affiliation beneficial. They occupy varying degrees of status in our society, but as employees they have recognized that they can do more by cooperating with each other than they can through isolated associations.

Improvements in social security, medicare, federal aid to education, improvements in laws affecting collective bargaining, tax reforms--the whole broad spectrum of the AFL-CIO program--are designed to help those who work for wages and salaries.

AFL-CIO Affiliation Helps Avoid Strikes

One other misconception needs to be cleared up. No AFL-CIO official can call a strike of teachers, nor exercise any control over AFT policy in any way. Yet, those who set the association "line" continue to insist that AFL-CIO affiliation somehow leads to strikes. They even state, contrary to fact, that when one AFL-CIO union strikes, all AFL-CIO unions go out. But, as they should know, when a union calls a strike, it takes full responsibility. Other unions decide as a matter of conscience whether they will cross the picket line. No teacher has ever been penalized in any way for either honoring or crossing a non-teacher picket line, just as no non-teacher has ever been penalized for honoring or crossing a teacher picket line.

While AFL-CIO leaders can never call teacher strikes, they often help settle them. They use their position of trust in the community and among the teachers to bring both parties back to the bargaining table and then to insist upon "good faith negotiations." Even more often, local AFL-CIO leaders use their good offices to win improved teaching conditions that remove the need to strike. Perhaps this is why there have been fewer strikes by union-affiliated teachers than by those without affiliation.

The AFT Spirit

The AFT spirit is spreading. ~~It is based on the idea that teaching, as distinguished from administering and supervising, is a separate profession and should be so organized.~~ Organized teachers have everything to gain from AFL-CIO affiliation. Anything an unaffiliated organization can do, that same organization could do better with the added advantage of affiliation with the AFL-CIO. Of all

people, teachers should seek the widest possible contact with the rest of organized society. This is the fundamental reason why we maintain our participation in that nationwide brotherhood called the AFL-CIO.

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