

# The Agenda That Saved Public Education

*Albert Shanker was president of the AFT from 1974 until his death in 1997. His ideas about teacher unionism, improving schools, and the importance of public education have substantially shaped the perspective of the modern AFT. In a new biography of Shanker, excerpted below, the author, Richard Kahlenberg, argues that Al's "biggest accomplishment of all was surely to preserve a system of public education against those who would like to see it dismantled in favor of a system of private-school vouchers." Explaining his plan to defend public education by improving it, Al often said, "you can't beat something with nothing." He redefined the role of union leader to include advocacy of education reform, and was constantly trying out thoughtful ideas for improvement. The need to counter bad ideas with good ones is as vital today as it was 10 or 20 years ago. All of us in education still have much to learn from his life.*

—EDITORS

By Richard D. Kahlenberg

**A**lbert Shanker was a man constantly on the go. As president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City and the AFT nationally, he was forever giving speeches, negotiating contracts, testifying before Congress, walking picket lines, and meeting with

unionist and human rights activists abroad. He was constantly churning out new ideas, which he outlined in some 1,300 weekly "Where We Stand" columns, commenting on education reform, unions, race relations, and politics. He was passionate about his work, traveling 300,000 to 500,000 miles a year.

He started down this extraordinary path in 1960. Back then, collective bargaining for teachers was generally thought impossible because it was illegal for public employees to go on strike. Shanker and a handful of other teachers in New York City convinced several thousand colleagues to break the law and risk being fired. Because the school board could not dismiss all the striking teachers, it backed down and eventually recognized the right of the UFT to bargain on behalf of teachers. Other teachers joined on, and from 1960 to 1968, union representation grew from five percent of New York City's teaching staff to 97 percent.<sup>1</sup> With collective bargaining came a huge change in the culture of teaching. Teachers had been accustomed to being pushed around: They were poorly paid, forced to eat their lunches while supervising students, and told to bring a doctor's note if they were out sick. Collective bargaining brought them higher salaries and also greater dignity.<sup>2</sup>

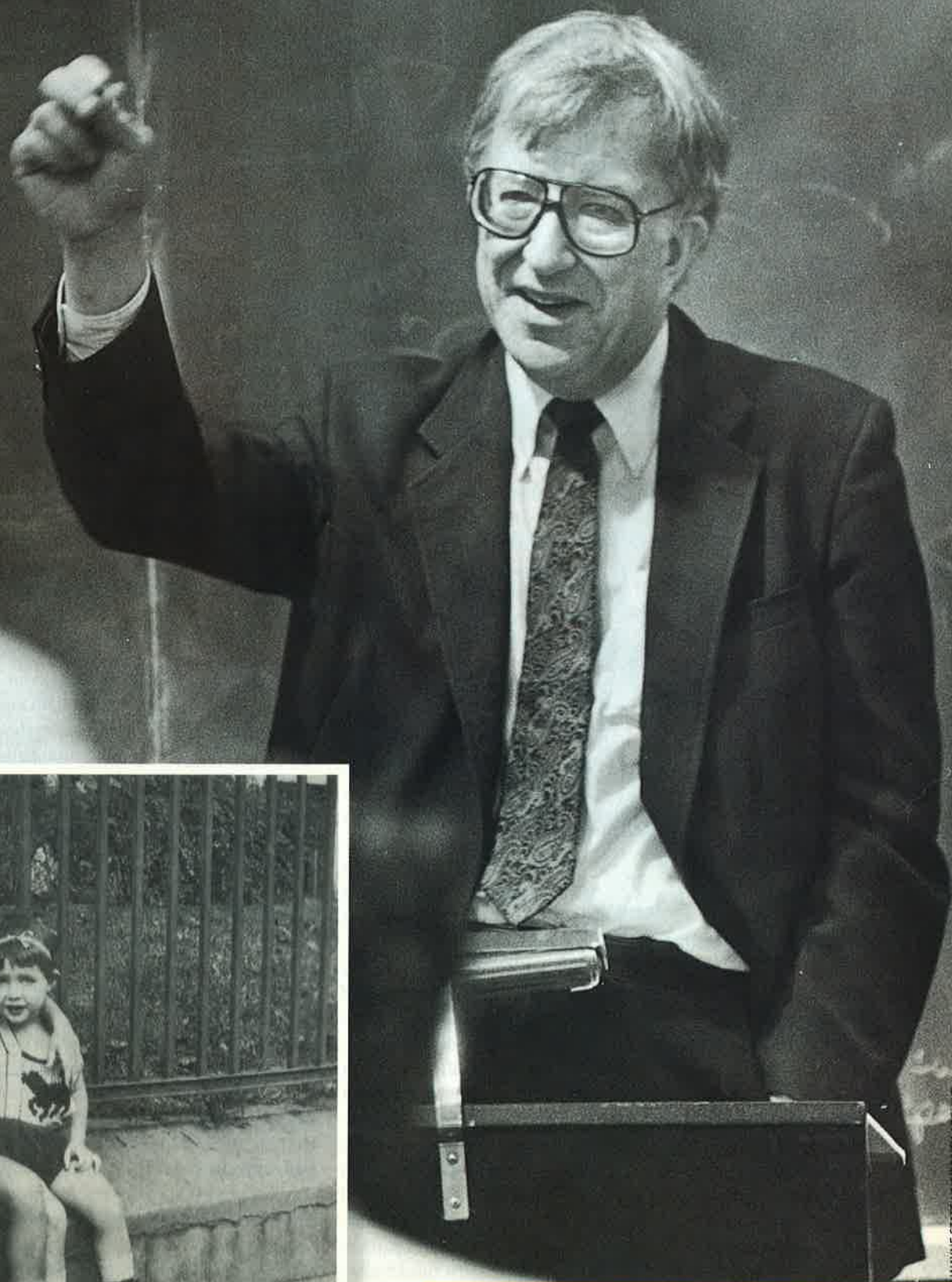
"He was the George Washington of the teaching profession," said union leader Tom Mooney. "He's the one who rallied us to liberate ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

As head of a union of teachers, Shanker stood at the intersection of the two great engines for equality in the U.S.—public education and organized labor. He once told an interviewer, "If I didn't have to make a living, I would have done this as a volunteer."<sup>4</sup>

Between his role as a father of modern teacher unions and his role as a leading education reformer, Shanker was arguably the single individual most responsible for preserving public education in the U.S. during the last quar-

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*Shankar teaches class at the Harvard University School of Education in the fall of 1987. Inset, family photograph of Shanker with his sister, Pearl.*





WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE



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*The early days. Left, Shanker as a young teacher in New York City. Above, he hunts and pecks for yet another "Where We Stand," the weekly New York Times column he wrote from 1970 until his death in 1997.*

ter of the 20th century. Though Shanker held no public office, he became supremely influential, constantly invoked in education circles. "In the course of the past two decades," educator and author E. D. Hirsch, Jr., wrote in 1997, "Albert Shanker made himself the most important figure in American education."<sup>5</sup> While secretaries of education came and went, as did presidents of the much larger National Education Association (NEA), Shanker endured, and he outdid and out-thought all of them. If Horace Mann was the key educational figure in the 19th century and John Dewey in the first half of the 20th century, Albert Shanker has stood as the most influential figure since. As a central thinker, writer, and player in all the great education debates of the last quarter century—whether school restructuring, teacher quality, or education standards—he was, journalist Sara Mosle argues, "our Dewey."<sup>6</sup>

Shanker's commitment was both philosophical and personal. Public education had allowed Shanker, the son of a newspaper deliveryman, to rise to a position of power

and influence. "He always felt that if there hadn't been good public education, then certainly we would never have been able to do what we did," his sister Pearl notes.<sup>7</sup> His childhood friend Ed Flower says that for Shanker personally, everything he achieved was not through any personal contacts that his parents had—they were poor people without influence—it was through public education. As the head of the teachers' union, Flower says, Shanker wanted to do well for his members. But education "was a be all and end all," because Shanker believed "what these kids are going to learn in school, what they are going to achieve mentally, [is] going to set the rest of their lives."<sup>8</sup> Years later, Shanker would write: "Whenever the problems connected with school reform seem especially tough, I think about this. I think about what public education gave me—a kid who couldn't even speak English when I entered first grade. I think about what it has given me and can give to countless numbers of other kids like me. And I know that keeping public education together is worth whatever it takes."<sup>9</sup> Shanker argued:

Our public schools have played a major part in the building of a nation.

They brought together countless children from different cultures—to share a common experience, to develop understanding and tolerance of differences. The public schools "Americanized"; they taught our language and our history.... Only public schools are designed to educate every child; only public schools serve to bring many diverse groups together.<sup>10</sup>

## A New Type of Union Leader

Shanker became the most influential education reformer of the second half of the 20th century by utterly transforming the role of a teachers' union leader. Shanker saw that by the early 1980s the great labor agenda of the previous epoch—Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, the minimum wage, and civil rights—had run into a political cul-de-sac. But education still had political backing. Education groups had been fairly isolated as a community, but that changed when, for the first time, governors and business people became intimately involved in education in the 1980s. Only one leader from the education community fully recognized this change, educator Michael Usdan says. "Shanker was really kind of the prime ambassador" of the education community to business people and governors.<sup>11</sup>

Education reform has been around as long as there has been education, but if there was a turning point in recent times, it came on April 26, 1983, with the publication of a report called *A Nation at Risk*. Against the backdrop of

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declining American dominance following the war in Vietnam, the Iran hostage crisis, and the collapse of the American automobile industry, the Reagan Administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education warned that poor test scores compared to other developed countries threatened to further undermine American economic competitiveness with Japan and West Germany.<sup>12</sup> *A Nation at Risk* was different from the numerous other education reports released each year: People listened. Education historian Diane Ravitch called *A Nation at Risk* "the most important education reform document of the 20th century."<sup>13</sup> And Albert Shanker's role in the report's reception was pivotal.

There was a great deal of pressure within labor and education circles to be critical of anything associated with Ronald Reagan.<sup>14</sup> Recalls education-policy expert Jim Kelly, "The first reaction from ... almost all education leaders was to trash the report."<sup>15</sup> The major educational organizations—the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National School Boards Association—were all cool to the report. The NEA's Don Cameron called *A Nation at Risk* and other similar reports "the usual doom and gloom."<sup>16</sup> Milt Goldberg, the executive director of the National Commission on Excellence in Education recalls that the NEA "didn't like it at all" and that he was hissed at when he spoke to an NEA convention audience about the report.<sup>17</sup> The NEA executive committee, Cameron later said, "believed that the *A Nation at Risk* report and its attendant publicity had no legs, and that this latest incarnation of education

reform was just another passing fad that would fade like the morning haze."<sup>18</sup>

When *A Nation at Risk* was released in 1983, Shanker and a group of top union officials sat together and read the document. Sandra Feldman, who succeeded Shanker as the president of the AFT in 1997, recalled: "We all had this visceral reaction to it. You know, 'This is horrible. They're attacking teachers.' Everyone was watching Al to hear his response. When Al finished reading the report, he closed the book and looked up at all of us and said, 'The report is right, and not only that, we should say that before our members.'"<sup>19</sup>

Shanker's embrace of *A Nation at Risk* represented an enormous departure from past AFT policy. Here was a major union leader endorsing a report that said public education was in trouble, proposed merit pay, had the strong backing of business, de-emphasized the importance of labor's equality agenda, and put emphasis on all kids rather than just the poor. It was "absolutely momentous, a watershed moment" for the AFT, says longtime staffer Greg Humphrey.<sup>20</sup> Said Sandra Feldman: "It was very significant. The union hadn't thought that way before."<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the AFT's embrace of *A Nation at Risk* gave Shanker a seat at the reform table that might not have been available had he simply been obstructionist. Says education reformer Marc Tucker: "He saw the future coming and he thought that teachers could lead it and not get rolled over by it."<sup>22</sup> Shanker knew that by becoming part of the debate, he could seek to influence and shape it.<sup>23</sup> Governors and others with creative ideas would often go to the AFT for their input, because there was a possibility the AFT might be open. The NEA, by contrast, was seen as inflexible.<sup>24</sup> Educator Michael Usdan says Shanker's embrace of *A Nation at Risk* helped him navigate the new "politics of education" in the early 1980s. While teacher unions were being reviled as special-interest groups that blocked promising reforms, Shanker let loose with a flurry of his own reform proposals that one newspaper said made the AFT look as much like a think tank as a union.<sup>25</sup>

## Proposing Peer Assistance and Review

As the issue of teacher quality gained salience following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, critics were complaining that the system of tenure, backed by union lawyers, made it virtually impossible to fire inadequate teachers. Shanker was willing to rethink the issue, although he was opposed to abolishing tenure. Given the low pay provided to teachers, tenure was an important tool for attracting good-quality teachers. More fundamentally, tenure was essential to protecting academic freedom. Tenure had been established in New York City back in 1917 to protect against political firings of teachers.<sup>26</sup> Under tenure, said Shanker, "an elected politician can't say, 'I'm going to fire you because you didn't support me in the last election.'"<sup>27</sup> Before tenure, it was also common for districts to fire senior teachers and hire younger, cheaper ones in lean times.<sup>28</sup> If teachers did not have tenure, unions argued,



teachers would have an incentive to give students good grades for fear that a bad grade might trigger an effort by parents to fire them.

Eliminating tenure was out of the question, but defending teacher incompetence was equally intolerable and politically unacceptable. Was there a third way? In 1984, Shanker embraced an explosive one: peer review. Two years earlier, Shanker had come across a new, highly controversial plan used in Toledo, Ohio, in which expert teachers were involved in reviewing new and veteran teachers, providing assistance, and in some cases, recommending termination of employment for colleagues. The notion struck at the heart of what unionism stood for—solidarity and job security—but Shanker was intrigued.

Peer review was not merely a defensive measure to preserve tenure, Shanker argued. It was a way of advancing two long-held union objectives: democratization of the workplace and increasing professionalization. Peer review and assistance would make teacher unions more like craft guilds, which have apprenticeships and job-placement programs.<sup>29</sup> Peer review would also strengthen the case for teacher involvement in other areas, like textbook selection and curriculum development. If teachers implied that only administrators were smart enough to be able to determine who is a good teacher, that would undercut the argument that teachers should be involved in these other areas, Shanker said.<sup>30</sup> (To read more about peer review, see the sidebar on page 10.)

### **Making Teaching a Profession**

By the mid 1980s, Shanker was ready to move into high gear with his agenda to reinvent teacher unionism and promote the professionalization of teaching. In 1985, he gave a trio of speeches—at the National Press Club in January, at the NYSUT convention in Niagara Falls in April, and at an AFT educational issues convention in July—that offered a radically different vision for teachers and would be remembered as among his most famous.

In the January 1985 speech at the National Press Club, Shanker proposed a rigorous national exam for new teachers, something that “no national organization in American education” had ever done, Shanker noted.<sup>31</sup> The existing system of state-by-state teacher standards, supported by the NEA, was not working, Shanker said. Twelve states did not even have tests, and while many of the rest used the Educational Testing Service’s National Teachers Examination, each state set its own passing score.<sup>32</sup> Shanker said the existing standards “would be considered a joke by any other profession.” He said a Florida test for math teachers required only a sixth-grade proficiency. “That’s equivalent to licensing a doctor on the basis of elementary biology.”<sup>33</sup>

Shanker had long argued that while passing the test did not mean a candidate would be a good teacher, a teacher who did not know basic content was unlikely to be effective.<sup>34</sup> He argued that the national teachers’ exam would help professionalize teaching, making teachers more like doctors and lawyers who must pass licensing examinations.

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And he backed up the proposal with a declaration that the AFT would limit membership to those who passed.<sup>35</sup>

In April 1985, Shanker delivered his second major address of the trio at the NYSUT convention in Niagara Falls. In the hour-long speech, Shanker argued for a “new professionalism.” Just as the AFT had revolutionized teaching by introducing collective bargaining 25 years earlier, he said, it was time for “a second revolution,” in which teachers would “take a step beyond collective bargaining” to improve education.<sup>36</sup> Limiting action to collective bargaining made teachers appear unprofessional, he said. “We tend to be viewed today as though we are acting only in our own self-interest, wanting better salaries and smaller classes so our lives can be made easier. That image is standing in the way of our achieving professional status, for not only must we act on behalf of our clients, we must be perceived as acting that way.”<sup>37</sup>

In the speech, Shanker outlined a classical definition of what it meant to be a professional. A professional receives a liberal-arts education, then specialized training, and then must pass a rigorous exam before beginning to practice. She participates in an internship, is guided by mentors, and participates in reviewing the performance of colleagues. The reciprocal set of rights—greater autonomy and higher compensation—comes once these professional responsibilities are met.<sup>38</sup> In Shanker’s vision, policies like a rigorous national test, peer review, and career ladders were not just defensive moves against critics of public school teachers, they were prerequisites to the professionalization of teaching. It was one of Shanker’s most important speeches not because it contained a number of new policy propos-



als, but because it provided a conceptual framework that tied together much of what he had been proposing under a rubric of teacher professionalization.

If Shanker's Niagara Falls speech made professionalism the organizing principle, his third added a new plank of tremendous importance. In a July 11, 1985, address to the AFT's Quality Educational Standards in Teaching (QuEST) conference in Washington, D.C., Shanker again made front-page news by backing an innovative compromise on the merit pay issue: a system under which excellent teachers could receive national board certification, akin to doctors—and extra pay.<sup>39</sup> He told the conference: "We've heard the arguments about merit pay for at least 50 years, and the issue does not go away. Most people in this country believe hard work and better work ought to be rewarded, and opposing this makes us look like we are not interested in quality. So we ought to think about ways of handling the issue while avoiding the pitfalls."<sup>40</sup>

Shanker called for the creation of a series of new national boards, made up largely of teachers and set up in different areas of the curriculum, like math, science, and history, to certify "superduper" teachers who passed a rigorous test and other evaluations. Local school boards and states would then have an incentive to pay board-certified teachers salary premiums. Shanker estimated that about 20 percent of the nation's two million teachers might become board certified.<sup>41</sup>

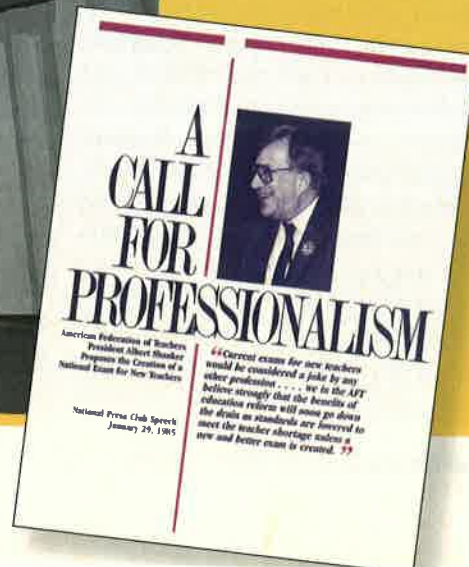
The proposal for national boards was meant to satisfy the key goals of merit pay proposals: attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. Because teachers reach their top salary level by their mid-thirties, precisely when people in other professions see their salaries take off, the main way to increase one's salary was to move into administration. Board certification offered a way to keep excellent

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teachers in the classroom.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, a national board, using objective criteria, would avoid the problems of favoritism that plagued traditional merit pay schemes. And because there was no fixed quota limiting who could qualify, national board certification would not pit teachers against one another and discourage cooperation the way many merit pay schemes did.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, teachers would not be penalized for out-of-school influences because



*High standards for teachers and strong professional development—like that offered in the AFT's QuEST (Quality Education Standards in Teaching) Conferences—were among Shanker's top priorities.*



extra pay was linked to extra qualifications, not student achievement.

Shanker's embrace of education reform won him plaudits from the press, the academy, foundations, the business community, and leaders in government. *The New Republic* ran the story "Albert Shanker, Statesman: The Fiery Unionist as Educational Leader," while the *Wall Street Journal* declared: "Shanker, Once-Militant Head of Teachers' Union, Now Is Called Original Thinker in Education."<sup>44</sup> A *U.S. News & World Report* story on the New American Establishment named Shanker as one of 10 key voices on education, along with the U.S. Secretary of Education, the presidents of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the University of Chicago, New York University, the University of California, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the then-governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton.

Throughout his career, Shanker was guided by the related goals of democracy in education and the professionalization of teaching. In 1960, 1962, 1967, and 1968,

Shanker led militant strikes to raise the status of the profession and promote and defend a voice for teachers. That call for greater teacher voice continued to sound in his education proposals in the 1980s, albeit in a different political and educational environment. Peer review, for example, not only answered an argument for abolishing tenure, it gave expert teachers a greater voice in determining who would remain in the profession and who should leave. Likewise, the National Board was not only an answer to merit pay, it strengthened democratic control over the profession by ensuring that rewards would be determined not only by the whims of supervisors, but by objective criteria and an evaluation conducted mostly by fellow teachers. Shanker understood that teacher unions could sometimes look like they were unconcerned about educational quality. In launching proposals like the national teacher exam and National Board, he not only engaged in a defensive maneuver, blunting the effectiveness of the "special-interest" charge, but he also affirmatively engaged in a long-term project of marrying trade unionism and the professionalization of teaching.

## Peer Assistance and Review

Peer assistance and review was the brainchild of Dal Lawrence, the union president in Toledo, Ohio, an AFT affiliate. Like Shanker, Lawrence had strong union credentials that gave him credibility with members to try innovative things. He was also a maverick. For a number of years, Lawrence pushed the idea of improving teacher professionalism by having expert teachers mentor new teachers the way doctors mentor interns. He conducted a referendum among the members about the concept of peer assistance, and there was overwhelming support.<sup>1</sup>

Administrators in Toledo initially balked at the idea, because they viewed it as the principals' job to mentor and train new teachers. Principals worried that if they did not have an evaluation to hang over teachers, they could not get them to do what they wanted. But at one collective-bargaining session in March 1981, the attorney for the school district suggested: "If we can use these expert teachers to also work with our veteran teachers who are having severe difficulties, you've got a

deal." Lawrence shook hands, knowing it was going to be controversial. "Here we were, a teacher union, and we were evaluating and even recommending the non-renewal and terminations of teachers," Lawrence recalls. But when he went to the teachers, they supported him.<sup>2</sup>

Under the plan, Toledo set up a nine-member advisory board (consisting of five teachers and four administrators) to make decisions on assisting and, if necessary, terminating the employment of new and veteran teachers. Six votes were required for action.<sup>3</sup>

Lawrence and a couple of teachers traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1982 to explain their program of teacher evaluation, and many members of the AFT Executive Council were livid. "There were people cursing; they were pounding the table," Lawrence recalls, arguing the Toledo plan violated AFT policy. "It was a really bad scene," he says, "worse than I expected." No one spoke in favor of the plan until Shanker stepped in and said, "I think there's something you're missing." Lawrence says, "that was the

first clue that maybe he was on our side." Shanker proceeded to point out that teachers in other countries—including Canada and Great Britain—had similar programs and were more highly regarded than in the U.S. If teachers acted like doctors and lawyers and other self-regulated professions, they might win greater respect. Shanker did not win over the Executive Council, Lawrence recalls. "There were a lot of quiet, sullen people who left that room, and not one of them came over and shook my hand," but Shanker had planted the seed.<sup>4</sup>

On February 5, 1984, Shanker went public with his openness to peer review and devoted a "Where We Stand" column to the Toledo plan. He spelled out how it worked, and while he acknowledged the novelty and controversy of a system in which unions are involved in dismissing teachers, he said the program had been successful in reinforcing public confidence in the school system. "After a period of failures to pass bond issues, the 1982 large bond issue was passed with 70 percent of voters, the largest margin



## The Charter School Idea

In the mid-to-late 1980s, Shanker helped launch another important education reform: teacher-run "charter schools." In Shanker's original vision, these publicly financed schools would give teachers greater freedom to experiment with innovative teaching techniques, student groupings, and other education reforms. The experiments would be time-limited and subject to rigorous evaluation. Having propelled the idea, however, he would watch with increasing distress as the movement transformed into something quite different than he originally intended, with many—though not all—charter schools actually undercutting his initial vision.

Shanker's concept of charter schools grew out of his belief that schooling needed to be "restructured," to move beyond the old factory model of education. Fundamentally, the factory model—in which principals barked orders to teachers who lectured students who were passed from classroom to classroom and expected to learn at the same pace—was not working well for many kids and many teachers.<sup>45</sup> "You have to be like a doctor," Shanker said. "If

the medicine doesn't work, he doesn't bawl the hell out of you because you didn't respond to his pill. You've got to try a variety of things."<sup>46</sup>

Shanker's thoughts about restructuring and choice came together in a landmark address he gave at the National Press Club on March 31, 1988. In the speech and in subsequent articles, Shanker suggested that small groups of teachers and parents (as few as six) submit research-based proposals for schools (or schools within schools) to a panel consisting of the local school board and union officials. The teachers would say: "We've got a way of doing something different. We've got a way of reaching the kids that are not being reached by what the school is doing." Once given a "charter," the school would then be left alone for five or 10 years, as long as parents and teachers continued to support the experiment and there was no precipitous drop in achievement. Shanker also made clear that the charter schools should not draw from the pool of the most advantaged children, but rather should reflect the general school population.<sup>47</sup>

In keeping with the teacher-led vision for charter

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in the history of the city—a sure sign of public confidence in the schools."<sup>5</sup> Union leaders started phoning to find out more about the program—including Rochester, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Columbus.

In his State of the Union speech at the 1984 AFT convention and in subsequent interviews and articles, Shanker laid out the case for the Toledo plan. He began by acknowledging that peer review was unpopular with teachers. "I know I am sticking my neck out," Shanker said.<sup>6</sup> He acknowledged that under tradi-

tional labor-management relations, there is a bright line between workers and supervisors to avoid dual loyalties.<sup>7</sup> In his speech, he said: "We get a lot of questions—like how can teachers who are members of the union be involved in saying that another union member shouldn't be retained as a teacher?"<sup>8</sup> But it was time to acknowledge, he said, "that some teachers are excellent, some are very good, some are good, and some are terrible."<sup>9</sup> Shanker argued: "Either we are going to have to say that we are willing to improve the profession ourselves or the governors are going to act for us."<sup>10</sup>

Teachers have a strong self-interest in favoring a system that weeds out substandard colleagues. "Teachers have to live with the results of other people's bad teaching—the students who don't know anything," Shanker wrote.<sup>11</sup> In fact, because teachers more than administrators had to live with the consequences of incompetent colleagues and knew what others were doing wrong, peer review led to more dismissals than had occurred when administrators were in charge. In Cincinnati, which was the second city in the country to

adopt peer review, 10.5 percent of new teachers were found less than satisfactory by teacher reviewers, compared to 4 percent by administrators, and 5 percent were recommended for dismissal by teachers, compared with 1.6 percent of those evaluated by principals.<sup>12</sup> The same was true in other cities.<sup>13</sup>

In subsequent years, peer-review programs spread from Toledo and Cincinnati to Rochester, Columbus, Minneapolis, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Hammond, and elsewhere, some 30 cities in all.<sup>14</sup> Toledo's peer-review program was recognized by the Rand Corporation and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government as a model for teacher evaluation.<sup>15</sup> In Toledo, peer review proved to be exceedingly popular, with teacher support on the order of 10-to-1.<sup>16</sup>

—R.D.K.

*For more information on peer assistance and review for new teachers, go to [www.aft.org/topics/charting-the-course/downloads/chartingteachingqualityWEB.pdf](http://www.aft.org/topics/charting-the-course/downloads/chartingteachingqualityWEB.pdf).*

Endnotes for this excerpt are listed on American Educator's Web site at [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/fall2007/index.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm).





Left, Shanker and civil rights advocate Bayard Rustin rally to save paraprofessionals' jobs in 1970. Below, Shanker delivers a speech at the AFT Convention in Los Angeles in 1983.



GREG SALKOVITS

schools, the union would remain a central player, Shanker said. He called for districts to "create joint school board-union panels that would review preliminary proposals and help find seed money for the teachers to develop final proposals."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Shanker noted that the places where education reform and restructuring were occurring most actively were those areas where unions were strong. "You don't see these creative things happening where teachers don't have any voice or power or influence," he said.<sup>49</sup>

In the coming years, however, as state after state adopted charter-school laws and the federal government pitched in with seed money, Shanker watched with alarm as the concept he put forward began to move away from a public school reform effort to look more like a private school voucher plan.<sup>50</sup> Shanker was strongly opposed to vouchers—and anything resembling vouchers—because he questioned the very premise of voucher (and many charter) advocates: that we should give parents and kids whatever they want. Maximizing choice, he said,

may be the point of shopping malls. But it is not the point of education, and it is certainly not the reason the public—parents and non-parents alike—pays taxes to support education. We do so not to satisfy the individual wants of parents and students, but because of the public interest in producing an educated citizenry capable of exercising the rights of liberty and being productive members of society.<sup>51</sup>

Shanker soured on the charter-school movement pri-

marily because of dramatic changes in the movement itself. But in part, he changed his own mind about what type of education reform was most likely to improve the academic achievement of children. He became increasingly convinced that reforms like school restructuring and charter schools put the cart before the horse, because there was no general agreement on the goals to be pursued.<sup>52</sup> First, you needed outcome standards, so you could evaluate whether or not the reforms were helping or hurting.<sup>53</sup> A system of public school choice and charter schools without a system of standards made little sense. Shanker asked: How could parents judge schools without a system of standards in place to give a basis for comparison?<sup>54</sup>

Shanker began intensively examining systems abroad and came to the conclusion that having a high-quality national curriculum was critical. The reason innovative schooling in places like the Holweide School in Cologne worked well was that Germany had in place standards and a common curriculum.<sup>55</sup> In a March 1992 speech, Shanker argued: "What the Canadians and the Germans and the French and the Dutch and the Swedes and the Japanese and others have shown is that you can, in a pretty traditional system, do things that bring about substantially bet-



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ter results than the results that we produce."<sup>56</sup> Shanker later argued that the countries that did well on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) were not those with "vouchers or charter schools or any of the other jazzy schemes that we are being urged to try. Nearly all of these nations have clear and rigorous national or state curriculum standards, and everything they do in the schools is hitched to these standards."<sup>57</sup>

Charter schools were not empowering teachers; they were trying to undercut teacher unions. They were not providing innovative and creative ways of teaching an agreed-upon curriculum; they were creating their very own curricula. And there was no evidence that the experiments were raising student achievement, the ultimate test. So in the final years of his life, Shanker turned away from charters to a very different idea, where he would make his biggest mark yet: education standards.

### Champion of the Standards Movement

*A Nation at Risk* had done a good job of outlining what courses students should take and for how many years they should take them, but there was still a big hole at the center of American education: the lack of agreement on what skills and knowledge students should master. Teachers had textbooks, but no real guidance on what to prioritize, so they were essentially asked to create their own curricula. They ended up choosing very different topics to pursue, creating incoherence and confusion. A teacher could not assume to know what students had learned the year before, so just to be safe, many teachers ended up repeating material that some students had already learned, which was a waste of time and also induced boredom and created discipline problems. Given an incoherent curriculum, teach-

ers had little ground on which to collaborate and improve their skills. Since teachers were not on the same page content-wise, professional development tended to focus on vacuous topics such as learning styles, rather than on how best to teach, for example, the French Revolution.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, although testing had long existed, too often it assessed general skills, like an SAT test, rather than curriculum knowledge (like an AP test would assess).<sup>59</sup>

In an influential paper, education reformers Marshall Smith and his co-author Jennifer O'Day argued for an alternative to this chaos: standards-based reform that could promote both excellence and equity.<sup>60</sup> Smith and O'Day outlined a systemic reform in which all horses—standards, curriculum, textbooks, tests, teacher training, and teacher development—pulled in the same direction. Directing everything was a "curriculum framework" or content standard of "what students should know and be able to do." The actual curriculum, materials, and state assessments would flow from the standards. Teacher licenses would be based on demonstrating the skills needed to teach the agreed-upon content. Finally, students and educators would be held accountable for mastering the content as measured by student assessments.<sup>61</sup>

Shanker wholeheartedly embraced standards-based reform. Many of America's competitors in Europe and Japan had systems of national standards, rigorous testing, and student accountability, and Shanker saw that these systems were providing higher levels of student achievement. The systems were coherent and made life more predictable for both teachers and students. Everyone knew in advance what was expected of them, and the system turned teachers and students from adversaries into allies. "It's like the Olympics," Shanker said. "There's an external standard that students need to meet, and the teacher is there to help the student make it."<sup>62</sup>

Shanker rejected the idea that a system of standards and testing would cramp teacher creativity and require them to "teach to the test." This would be a problem if states used unsophisticated multiple-choice tests, which put an emphasis on drilling and test-taking skills. But it was possible to develop excellent assessments, carefully tied to underlying curriculum, as was done in other high-achieving countries. Shanker argued: "Teaching to the test is something positive when you have really good tests."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Shanker was worried about an overemphasis on teacher creativity when it came to curriculum and teaching techniques. Professionals have certain protocols, based on research. He argued: "An ailing patient wouldn't want a doctor who said, 'I know what's usually done in situations like yours. But I like to be creative.'"<sup>64</sup> Instead, Shanker said teachers, like doctors, should normally follow the protocols of pedagogy and apply creativity only in the hard cases when traditional methods did not work.<sup>65</sup>

Shanker also argued that common content standards were egalitarian because they sought to teach children knowledge that is required to do well in mainstream society. In the 1980s, Shanker had become an early advocate of University of Virginia English Professor E. D. Hirsch's



Teachers had textbooks, but no real guidance on what to prioritize; they had little ground on which to collaborate and improve their skills. Since teachers were not on the same page content-wise, professional development tended to focus on vacuous topics such as learning styles, rather than on how best to teach, for example, the French Revolution.

argument that American students needed to be “culturally literate”—to master a body of facts that literate Americans know. While middle-class children usually pick up some of that knowledge on their own at home, poor kids rarely do, Shanker said.<sup>66</sup> Content standards also promote equity by making it clear to all the measures by which students were going to be judged. Standards also prevented poor children from receiving a less challenging curriculum.<sup>67</sup> He argued, “In a system without standards, they often go to schools where little or nothing is expected of them.”<sup>68</sup> Looking internationally, Shanker argued that systems in Germany, France, and Japan did better with low-income students because they have high standards: “Equity is better served by demanding a lot of all students—and helping them meet those demands.”<sup>69</sup>

As the standards movement began to pick up steam in the late 1980s, Shanker found himself virtually alone among members of the education establishment ready to join governors and business leaders in support.<sup>70</sup> Accountability was particularly risky for AFT teachers, education-policy analyst Michael Cohen says, because AFT “members were teaching in urban schools that were, by and large, not producing results” compared to the suburban districts, which were largely represented by the NEA.<sup>71</sup> But Shanker made a critical calculation that standards-based reform was the single best way to preserve public education, and he made that case directly to his skeptical membership.

It would have been unusual enough for Shanker, as a teachers’ union leader, to join the standards and accountability movement that made so many of his members nervous. But what was truly astounding to many was that he became the widely recognized leader of the movement. The *Los Angeles Times* labeled Shanker “the earliest and loudest voice for establishing and raising universal curriculum standards.”<sup>72</sup>

## Cancer Strikes

In the fall of 1993, while going for other tests, doctors discovered that Shanker had bladder cancer.<sup>73</sup> In November 1993, Shanker had a tumor removed from his bladder in an operation at George Washington University Hospital. The doctors were encouraged that the cancer did not appear to have invaded the wall of the bladder. But in a subsequent visit, the doctors discovered that the cancer had returned.<sup>74</sup> In March 1994, Shanker had to have his entire bladder removed.<sup>75</sup> Shortly thereafter, Eadie Shanker decided to retire from her job at the City University of New York to spend more time with her husband.<sup>76</sup>

In July 1994, Shanker ran for re-election as AFT president, saying his doctors had given him a “very good prognosis” for a full recovery. He was going through chemotherapy, however, and joked at the convention about his “new hairdo.” He thanked the delegates for their flowers and cards and said, “It’s been a very tough year, but it meant a lot.” He was re-elected unanimously.<sup>77</sup>

Then, in April 1996, Shanker was dealt an enormous setback when cancer was discovered in his lungs.<sup>78</sup> He began intensive chemotherapy and radiation treatment, but he tried to carry on his active schedule. He continued to travel overseas, and would research the local hospitals in advance in case he ran into trouble. He also kept writing his “Where We Stand” column. Eadie Shanker remembers, “Al would be home in bed. His column would be read to him over the phone and he’d go back and forth with Marcia Reecer about it.”<sup>79</sup> Eadie says, “staying president of the union is what kept him alive.”<sup>80</sup>

As the AFT national convention in Cincinnati approached in early August 1996, Shanker considered not seeking re-election, but eventually decided to run.<sup>81</sup> He was scheduled to give his regular State of the Union speech on August 2, but was too ill. The next day, however, he rallied his strength. A reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* wrote: “Thousands of teachers jumped to their feet when Shanker, obviously ill, slipped out unannounced from behind a heavy curtain and made his way slowly across the stage. Their applause thundered across the immense hall, and tears streamed down some faces.” He delivered “a rousing, hour-long keynote speech.”<sup>82</sup>

Shanker covered a number of topics, but is most remembered for saying two things. The first was a spirited defense of trade unions. He declared: “We’ve got a good story to tell. We’ve got a great historic institution to preserve.... We’ve overcome tremendous odds, and we’ve done it





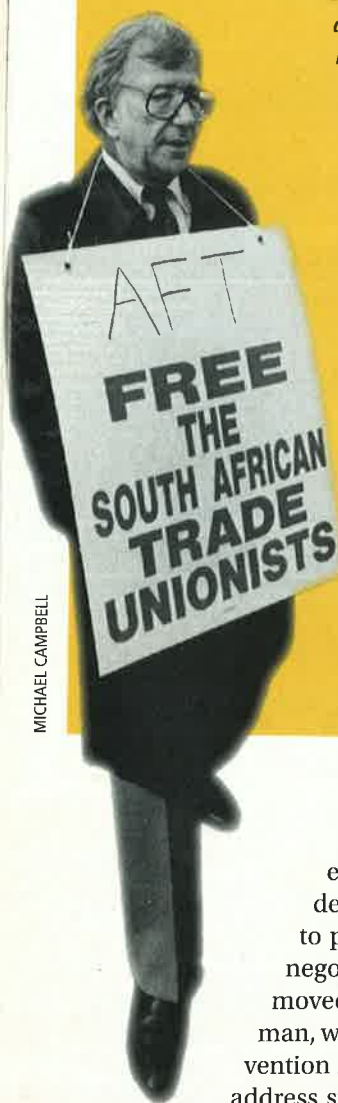
UFT/ROBERT F. WAGNER LABOR ARCHIVES



*Shanker was committed to human rights at home and abroad. Above, he and his wife Eadie are escorted through a refugee camp in Thailand in 1978. Top right, Shanker enjoys an evening in 1967 with Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, national leaders with whom he worked closely throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Bottom right, Shanker marches to generate support for Soviet dissidents Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Left, Shanker joins a demonstration in front of the South African embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1984.*



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

against money and animosity and power..."<sup>83</sup> The second point was that teacher unions needed to fully engage in education reform. He told delegates: "It is as much your duty to preserve public education as it is to negotiate a good contract."<sup>84</sup> Many were moved by the sight of a completely bald man, who was transported around the convention in an electric cart and delivered his address sitting down, telling delegates, once again, that teachers needed to go beyond their narrow self-interest to preserve an institution so fundamental to democratic society.<sup>85</sup>

## Rooted in Democracy

It was a fitting final State of the Union speech. Throughout his life, Shanker faced critics and allies who thought he had

a strange mix of traditionally liberal and conservative views. But Shanker argued that all of his views were part of a well-thought-out ideology that put democracy at the core.

Shanker's traditionally liberal positions—on unions, public education, and economic inequality—all found their roots in a democratic ideology. Unions to Shanker were not merely economic actors, they were institutions to democratize capitalism, provide a voice to workers in their occupations, and counter the strong influence of corporations. Responding to critics, like Bob Dole, who tried to praise teachers while villifying their unions, Shanker asked: "Who started teacher unions? Who pays the dues that keep them going? Who elects the officers and determines union policies?"<sup>86</sup> And he pointed out: "Unions developed because teachers thought they needed them" to raise salaries and lift up the dignity of the profession.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Shanker's justification for public education also fundamentally came back to democratic principles. He believed that the public schools' mission was to provide two ingredients central to



a well-functioning democracy: social mobility and social cohesion. His support for policies promoting greater economic equality (minimum wage, healthcare, and the like) was based on the fact that democracy can only work well when there is a strong middle class.<sup>88</sup> In an overwhelmingly poor and uneducated society, dangerous demagogues can manipulate the masses more easily, and extreme economic inequality skews political power through the use of money in politics.<sup>89</sup>

But Shanker's traditionally conservative positions on issues such as student discipline, multiculturalism, and human rights were also rooted in a democratic ideology. Shanker's tough discipline policies were about keeping

public schools truly public spaces. Just as yielding to disorder in public parks undercut their democratic nature, so yielding to disorder in the classroom led to middle-class flight from public schools and increased pressure for school vouchers, both of which undercut the democratic function of schooling. Shanker proposed "alternative educational settings for students who are violent and regularly so disruptive that they prevent all the other children from learning."<sup>90</sup> He argued that "We need to help violent kids, but letting them rule the schools isn't helping them, and it's destroying the kids who want to save themselves. That's not decent, wise, or practical."<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, while Shanker had long pushed for the inclu-

## "Where We Stand"

"Where We Stand," a weekly paid column, began running in December 1970, in the Sunday *New York Times*' Week in Review section. Its impact was monumental.

In the late 1960s, Shanker had grown frustrated that his attempts to be published in various magazines and newspapers had been rebuffed. One day, while he was having lunch with Arnold Beichman, an academic and former unionist with the electrical workers, Beichman suggested that Shanker buy an advertisement in the *Times*. "Just buy the space like General Motors buys space," Beichman said.

While paid columns are today quite common, "Where We Stand" appears to have been the first paid column of its type in the *Times*.<sup>1</sup> The placement was ideal, because Shanker felt he was not getting fair coverage in the newspaper. Initially, Beichman says, Abe Rosenthal, managing editor of the *Times*, refused to sell space to Shanker, but Shanker appealed to the publisher, Punch Sulzberger, who overrode Rosenthal.<sup>2</sup>

"In 1968," Shanker recalled, "I became convinced that I had been dead wrong in believing that the public's opinion of me didn't matter. Public schools depend on public support. And the public was not likely to support the schools for long if they thought the teachers were led by a madman."<sup>3</sup> Shanker explained, "I decided to devote some time and

energy to letting people know that the union's president was someone who read books and had ideals and ideas about how to fix schools."<sup>4</sup> The UFT agreed to sponsor the space for 13 weeks, with the option to extend for a year. The annual cost was \$100,000.<sup>5</sup> Shanker's ability to get the union to spend an extraordinary sum for something so unfamiliar to unions was a sign of his clout within the organization.<sup>6</sup>

The column lasted more than 13 weeks—indeed, it lasted many more than 13 years. It always appeared with his picture. For more than a quarter of a century, Shanker's face—adorned with "black horn-rimmed glasses and a mournful cast, like Eeyore in 'Winnie the Pooh,'" said the *Times*—appeared at the head of more than 1,300 eight-hundred-word columns.<sup>7</sup> If his columns were compiled in average-size books of 150,000 words each, the columns would fill seven volumes.

The gambit worked because Shanker was a font of ideas, and he was a font of ideas because he was forever reading. Shanker's childhood love of books never left him, and he was constantly reading, even though he was practically blind in one eye.<sup>8</sup> He loved history, philosophy, and politics, and his favorite authors included George Orwell, Edmund Wilson, Irving Howe, Arthur Koestler, Bernard Malamud, and Ignazio Silone.<sup>9</sup> He also loved to read magazines like *The New Republic*, *Dis-*

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*sent*, *Commentary*, *Encounter*, the *Public Interest*, the *Economist*, *Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Scientific American*, the *Paris Review*, and the *Partisan Review*, and he would save all the back issues.<sup>10</sup>

His library was tremendously broad, from philosophy to religion, from education to politics, from Aquinas and Aristotle to Zinsser and Zimoviev. In his 4,000-book collection, he had several books on Orwell,

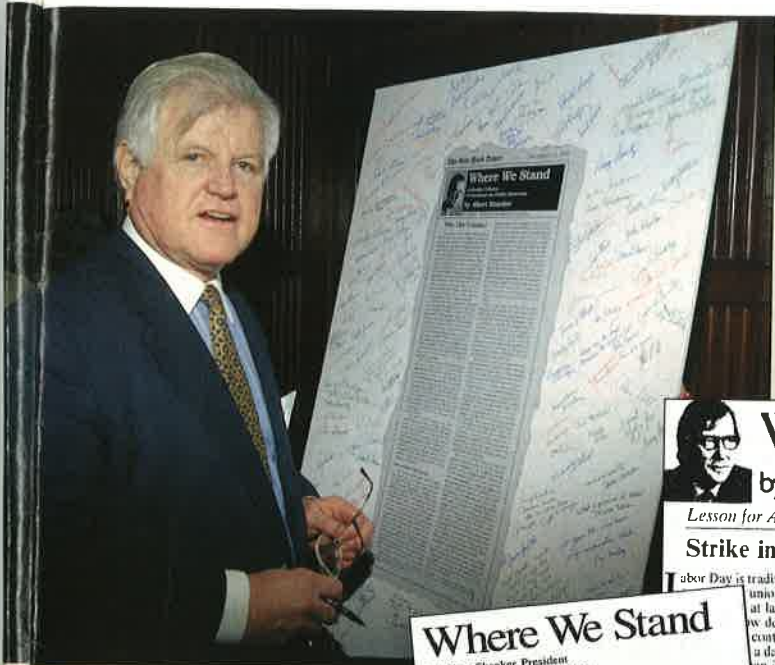


sion of various ethnic contributions into the history curriculum, he believed that the core knowledge of the dominant culture was essential for all students to master if they wished to advance socioeconomically within the society. Shanker cited E. D. Hirsch's research, which found that in West Germany and France, the children of low-income Turkish guest workers and other immigrants did much better academically than low-income Americans in part because they were exposed from a very early age to the key elements of the dominant culture.<sup>92</sup> Shanker argued:

Some people have been very critical of Hirsch's proposals on the grounds that they try to impose the dominant

culture on groups that would rather have their children learn their own culture. But the thrust of Hirsch's proposal is egalitarian. He believes that by starting early and by giving all children the same core knowledge to learn, we can prevent the creation of an educational underclass.<sup>93</sup>

As a result, Shanker opposed extreme forms of multiculturalism that turned away from the sensible idea that students should learn about all different groups and claimed that minority students should mainly learn about their own group's accomplishments and learn history from the point of view of their own group.<sup>94</sup> Extreme multiculturalism, Shanker said, "isn't really multiculturalism at all



MILTON WILLIAMS

*In 1995, Senator Ted Kennedy attended a New York Times-sponsored reception to celebrate the 25th anniversary of "Where We Stand."*

colleague says, were "the requirements of a democratic society."<sup>16</sup>

Many of the columns sought to make readers understand what it is like to be a teacher.<sup>17</sup> And he would return time and time again to outline a "liberal" opposition to school vouchers and a "conservative" concern about school discipline.<sup>18</sup> He sometimes had guest columns from

a variety of authors—from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Bayard Rustin to Diane Ravitch. But most columns he wrote himself, with the help of a succession of writers.

The column was famous for taking complicated scholarly ideas and presenting them in readable form.<sup>26</sup> Like George Orwell, Shanker avoided the intel-

lectual's fondness for abstraction and instead paid attention to concrete realities.<sup>27</sup> The columns also took definite positions, reflecting Shanker's character, taking "stands" as the column's title suggested.

The column became a phenomenon in education circles. It made Shanker, said the *Washington Post*, "the best-read educator in America."<sup>29</sup> His column was, says education professor Maurice Berube, "the only column on national education dealing with national issues that was read by everybody."<sup>30</sup>

—R.D.K.

## Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President  
American Federation of Teachers

### A Large Wooden Horse?

Where are we going to get all the money to pay for all the new schools? We are used to seeing conservatives go all out in support of vouchers, but what about a conservative who argues against providing public money to start religious and other private schools? Timothy Lamer, whose op-ed piece, "A Conservative Case Against School Choice," recently appeared in the *Washington Post* (November 6, 1996), is such a rarity. Lamer thinks that conservatives who push for vouchers are ignoring or distorting the principles. He intends his article as a wake-up call to conservatives, but it should suggest to members of the public generally that there is something fishy about the conservative crusade for vouchers. How come conservatives are pushing something so alien to their usual point of view?

Here are some voucher arguments advanced by conservatives that go against the conservative grain. If Clinton Clinton run... Many conservatives are currently using an equally argument to push vouchers. They say that if Clinton Clinton can choose a top private school, it is not fair to deny this opportunity to poor children. As Lamer points out, this is a reasonable departure from conservatives' usual position in regard to social inequalities. How often have you heard conservatives saying that poor children should have access to the same kind of medical care as their rich kids? In fact, conservatives are generally quite comfortable with the idea that some Americans have more and better choices than others. "Inequality is a fact of life." Furthermore, they generally believe that when governments attempt to even things out, "they end up harming everyone." What happens to this suspicion of government when it comes



Conservatives who push for vouchers are disregarding some strongly held beliefs.

## Where We Stand

by Albert Shanker

Lesson for Americans in Struggle Abroad

### Strike in Poland: A Labor Day Sermon

Labor Day is traditionally a time to take a look at the problems facing workers unions. In that respect, this Labor Day will be no different. It is at layoffs and unemployment, the decline in productivity, inflation, defeat of labor law reform, the prospects for labor unity as continue with the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters. And a day to predict what will happen to working people in America as is elected as against the re-election of Jimmy Carter.

Labor Day story is not in this country. It is in Poland, where amid fears that at any moment there will be brutal repression, can do? What should our government be doing? What can we struggle in Poland?

don't want to do anything which will provide an excuse for our government has said clearly that we will not intervene.

remembers the AFT vice presidents receiving loads of reading materials from Shanker, which would take

a whole week to read. He "wanted his vice presidents to read and to understand."<sup>13</sup>

The column provided a discipline that helped Shanker think through issues, forcing him to arrive at positions.<sup>15</sup> The topics ranged widely, from education reform to human rights to labor unions to civil rights. What tied together the various columns, one

14 books by Dewey, 22 books by or about Sidney Hook, and books by George Counts and Lawrence Cremin. His office, says writer Ronald Radosh, "wasn't like what you expect your regular union leader's office to be," he said. "It was like an academic's office: papers, books, every kind of book."<sup>11</sup>

Shanker also encouraged his staff and union officials to read. Union official Velma Hill recalls that she would come into the office to talk about a particular issue and Shanker would say, "Velma, did you read this article? Well, what did you think of this article?" Staffers felt pressure to keep up on their reading.<sup>12</sup> Lorretta Johnson

Endnotes for this excerpt are listed on *American Educator's* Web site at [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/fall2007/index.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm).



but ethnocentrism."<sup>95</sup> By calling common history a sham, extreme multiculturalism, Shanker said, would undercut the central rationale for public education:

Americans have always seen public schools as places where children from various groups would learn to live together and value each other and where they would become acquainted with the common civic culture. If public schools become places where children learn that, fundamentally, they are not American, there will be no reason for taxpayers to continue supporting them. And there will be little to hold society together.<sup>96</sup>

Lastly, Shanker was just as rooted in democracy when it came to human rights—whether that left him aligned with liberals or conservatives. He argued: "When men and women are imprisoned, tortured, and killed because they dare to speak, write, or organize, it makes no difference whether they were silenced by leftists or a rightist dictator. The action must be condemned."<sup>97</sup> And he denounced what he saw as a double standard on the left. In the late 1970s, when the Vietnamese government was causing mass starvation in occupied Cambodia, Shanker asked: "Where are the expressions of outrage? Where are the demonstrations? How can it be that there are protests only against American support for the Shahs ... —whose crimes may be real enough and surely merit exposure—and none at all against the Soviet Union and Vietnam, who are within weeks of annihilating and wiping out an entire culture from the face of the earth?"<sup>98</sup>

Shanker remained, to the end, a liberal, and over a 30-year period he stood squarely for two central pillars of liberal thought: public education and organized labor. For Shanker, all roads led back to democracy.

**O**n consecutive days in early February 1997, not long before he died, Shanker received two tributes—one from the President of the United States and one from the president of the National Education Association. Neither mentioned Shanker by name publicly at the time, but there was little question about who inspired both sets of remarks.

On February 4, 1997, President Clinton devoted most of his State of the Union address to education, which he called his "number-one priority" for his second term. Clinton laid out a 10-point plan for education, the most important of which

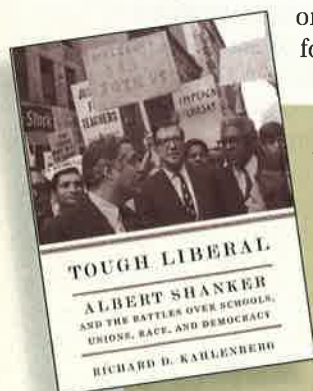
Shanker remained, to the end, a liberal, and over a 30-year period he stood squarely for two central pillars of liberal thought: public education and organized labor. For Shanker, all roads led back to democracy.

was a call for voluntary national tests by 1999. The tests would be given to fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math. The federal government would pay for the creation of the tests. Standards themselves would continue to be set by states, and the national tests would be voluntary—states would not be required to use them.<sup>99</sup> The vision of national tests rather than national standards was not precisely what Shanker had advocated, but it was a big step in the right direction.

Shanker watched the speech on television from his hospital bed and commented that Clinton was "the best that we're ever going to do."<sup>100</sup> Shanker's son Michael says: "Just being able to see the look on my father's face, even though he was sick ... of basically his life's work being brought to the State of the Union address ... was pretty amazing."<sup>101</sup> After the speech, Clinton called Shanker and told him: "You know, I hope you feel good now, because you've been telling us to do this for years and years and years, and finally your crusade will be America's crusade."<sup>102</sup>

Shanker returned the compliment in one of his last columns. It began: "With his State of the Union speech, President Clinton demonstrated that he is indeed the education president. The American public has been demanding higher academic standards. They are right, and with the President's leadership, we are now far closer to reaching that goal." Clinton knew that it is not "somehow kinder and more humane to expect less of poor kids in low-achieving schools."<sup>103</sup>

The second tribute came on February 5, the day after Clinton's speech, when Bob Chase, the newly elected president of the NEA, gave an extraordinary address at the



*AFT members may purchase Kahlenberg's book, **Tough Liberal**, at a discounted rate of \$18.00 including shipping (a discount of 40 percent off the list price). Visit AFT's online store at [www.aftstore.org/aft/product/enlarged.asp?ProductId=906401](http://www.aftstore.org/aft/product/enlarged.asp?ProductId=906401).*





*"How would our world be different if Al Shanker had gone on, as he planned, to become a professor of philosophy rather than a leader of teachers, an education reformer, a union activist, and a public writer? ... As a founding father of collective bargaining for teachers and a leading education reformer, he is the single person most responsible for reshaping and preserving public education in the last half of the 20th century."*

—Richard D. Kahlenberg  
Tough Liberal

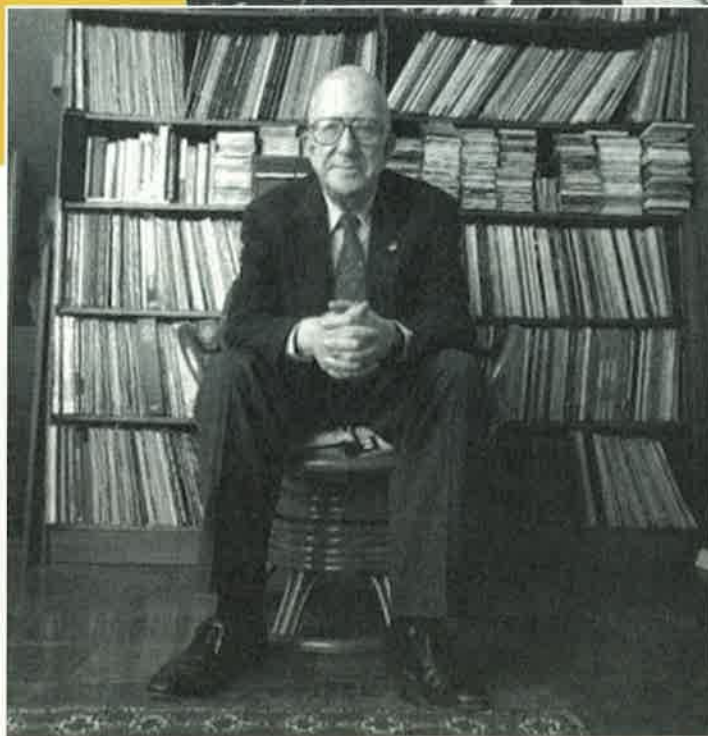
JENNIE SHANKER



National Press Club, acknowledging NEA errors.<sup>104</sup> He conceded that "in some instances, we have used our power to block uncomfortable changes, to protect the narrow interests of our members, and not to advance the interests of students and schools." He called for a "New Unionism" that puts "issues of school quality front and center at the bargaining table." He said the union must now embrace such reforms as peer review, or America would end up with a system of private-school vouchers. "We must revitalize our public schools from within, or they will be dismantled from without," he declared.<sup>105</sup>

The speech was motivated in part by an internal report that argued the NEA needed to become active in education reform and not just stick to traditional union activities.<sup>106</sup> But it had Shanker's fingerprints all over it. Education writer Thomas Toch notes: "It was exactly the same message that Albert Shanker had delivered ... 12 years earlier."<sup>107</sup> Chase later acknowledged his debt to Shanker. "Al taught us that we can defend public education without defending public education's status quo," he said. For those at the NEA, Chase commented, Shanker was a "tough teacher."<sup>108</sup>

As February progressed, Shanker knew the end was near. As Shanker lay in the hospital, his sister Pearl came



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE

to visit for the last time. He told her if he had to live his life over again, there was not much he would do differently. On February 22, 1997, Al Shanker died with much of his family by his side. □

Due to the numerous interviews and extensive document review, the endnotes for this excerpt are listed on *American Educator's* Web site at [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/fall2007/index.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm).