We understand that it's dangerous to let a lot of ideas out of the bag, some of which may be bad. But there's something that's more dangerous, and that's not to have any new ideas at all at a time when the world is closing in on you.

So if we're going to suffer, we're going to do it the right way, and we're going to come out fine.

—AFT QuEST Conference
Washington, D.C.
July 1985

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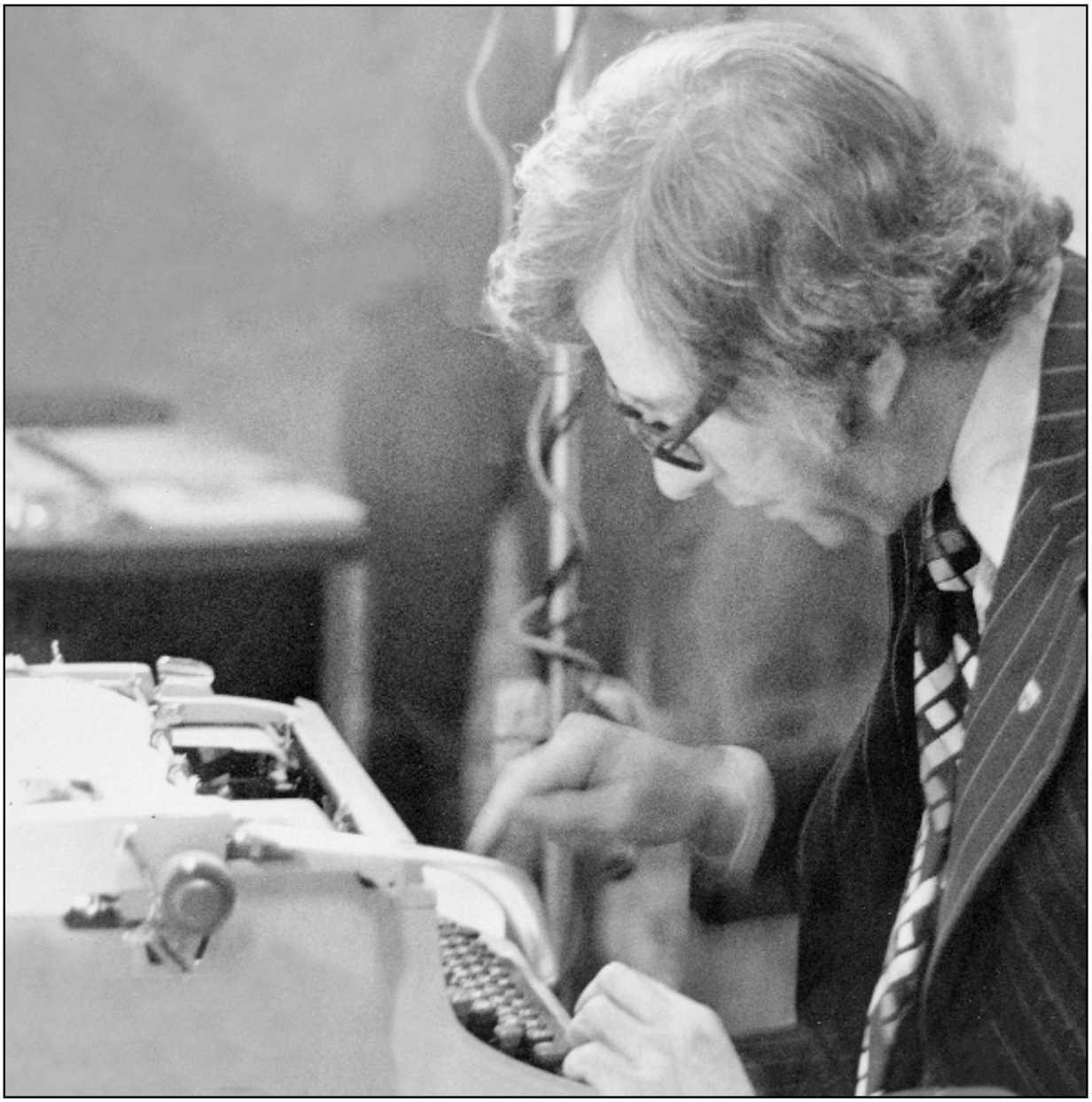

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Building the Union

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Opposite page: (top) Al joins Pittsburgh strikers in January, 1976, on the 51st day of a successful 55-day strike and (bottom) rallies San Francisco teachers in 1979. This page: Al takes the floor at the 1978 AFT convention in Washington, D.C.

Al Is Elected

Convention Proceedings
Toronto, Canada / August 1974

President Selden: I call on the Chairman of the Elections Committee for a report.

Delegate G. Donald White: The report of the Elections Committee is as follows:

Elected for President, Albert Shanker.

(Applause)

Shanker's Resolution To Commend Selden

Convention Proceedings
Toronto, Canada / August 1974

President Selden: Who's next?

[Cry of "microphone 4"]

President Selden: For what purpose?

President-elect Shanker: I move to suspend the rules for placing before this convention the following resolution—that the AFT express its deep appreciation to Dave Selden for his outstanding contributions to teacher unionism throughout the years.

[*Applause and cries of support*]

President Selden: All those in favor of suspending the rules for this purpose say "aye," opposed "no." It has unanimously carried. It carried and the resolution is now before you.

President-elect Shanker: I'd like to speak on the resolution, Mr. Chairman. I think there are many delegates here who have been teachers or members of the AFT over the last 25 years, and it is impossible to overstate the contribution Dave Selden has made.

In '50, '52, and '54 we had a national organization of under 50,000 members, with no thought that such an organization should ever expect collective bargaining because collective bargaining would mean that the majority would rule and nowhere were we a majority. He sold the idea in the union, and after he brought it to fruition in New York, he went from city to city convincing skeptical local leaders that this was the way to go. In doing this, he not only built the AFT, but revolutionized the NEA as well, turning it into a union rather than its traditional association mold.

Then there was the policy of no contract, no work, and the fact that teachers like other workers could use the strike effectively. Third was the notion of merger, which Dave did not come to last year or the year before or three years ago. I remember talking to him in the early '50s before we had even achieved collective bargaining and before we used the strike as a weapon.

He spoke to many of us that, years down the road, when we built a bigger union, the teachers of the country would have to get together—merger was his goal for many more than 20 years. He had the courage to do things that others did not. And I think one of the great contributions that he made, a few years ago, at great political risk, was to mandate affiliations of locals with their state federations. It is very difficult when we think of the more than fifty years that this organization existed without state federations in most places.

I could go on with this list, but I think, at this particular moment, all of us should spend a little bit of time thinking that [without Dave Selden] none of us would have the union we have today or would be pursuing the things that we are pursuing. None of us would have the hopes of achieving what we want to achieve for teachers in the union movement if Dave had not been with us all these years and had not done the things that he did. Thank you.

[The assembly arose and there was sustained applause]

President Selden: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Delegate: Mr. Chairman, —

President Selden: If we could have a little more order.

[The assembly sang "Solidarity Forever"]

Those Days Are Gone Forever

From "The Way It Really Is"
Phi Delta Kappan / February 1974

For over one hundred years teachers in this country were powerless. I can remember the nice editorials we used to get—editorials about how teachers are overworked and underpaid. It was the type of editorial you read during Be-Kind-to-the-Handicapped Week. It was full of sympathy for the powerless.

Things are a little different now. Teachers *have* a voice. Not a controlling one. We can't do everything we want. But, for the first time, we're *heard* and we get a *response.* We refuse to accept unilateral decisions from above. We have the courage to challenge superintendents, and we are willing to go to the press to explain our case to the public. [Critics of teacher unions] can cry all they want; they can try to bring back the good old days when docile teachers obeyed every edict, however asinine. But it's too late. Those days are gone forever.

Becoming a Disaster

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Honolulu, Hawaii / July 1975

I think of the time when I was on the negotiating team in New York City and we came very close to a strike. The mayor of the city was there and other officials. We said, "We need money for salaries and for class size"—and a number of things.

The mayor and the comptroller said, "We don't have the money; we don't have it; we don't have it." That was the only answer we got.

At that time we were a rather small union, and so we went back with very little.

A number of months later, the end of that summer, the tail end of a hurricane hit New York City. There were many telephone poles down and there were floods in the street, and the mayor appropriated $36 million to take care of the damage the floods had done to the city. Then, there was a tremendous snow storm and the city appropriated another $15 million for emergency snow removal.

And some months later, I met the mayor at a cocktail party and I said, "Do you remember when we were negotiating with you last year, you said you didn't have the money; but then when the hurricane came, you found millions of dollars; and when the snow storm came, you found millions of dollars?"

He looked at me and said, "Al, those were disasters."

Well, that was when I decided, if we wanted to succeed, we had to become a disaster, too.

[Applause]

Keep the Clock

From remarks to NYSUT Representative Assembly
New York City / March 1976

The New York State United Teachers was formed in 1972 through a merger of the NEA and AFT affiliates in New York state, but by 1976 conflicts between NYSUT and the NEA national organization threatened the merger. The following is an excerpt from a speech Al gave when the fate of NYSUT was being debated. Soon after, NYSUT voted overwhelmingly to sever its ties with NEA and remain an AFT affiliate.

When this whole disaffiliation thing came along, one evening I was reading a magazine and I ran into something that I think is appropriate in this situation. It is from a magazine called *The Public Interest,* published in the winter of 1970, and it had a story about what happened on April 11, 1969, two days after the Students for a Democratic Society occupied University Hall at Harvard University with a whole series of demands that would have destroyed the academic structure of the university. And at one meeting a professor stood up to speak to the faculty about what that particular group was doing.

He was talking to professors, some of whom were sympathetic to some of the students' demands, just as some of us may feel that on one issue or another maybe the NEA is closer to our particular views than NYSUT is.

He said,

> Your trouble is that you have not studied the literature of the subject. I am not going to give you a long reading list, but I must summarize for you one single item on that reading list. This is a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, a fairy tale that in the dark days of Nazi occupation the Danes used so subtly and so effectively. That fairy tale was called "The Most Unbelievable Thing."
>
> There was a kingdom and in the kingdom there was a king and he had a princess, and he was interested in the progress of the arts. And at a certain point he announced that he would give the princess in marriage to the man who would accomplish the most unbelievable thing.
>
> There was great excitement and tremendous competition in the land. Finally, the day came when all those prepared works had to be presented for judgment. There were many marvelous things, but towering high above them was a truly wonderful thing. It was a clock—a clock produced by a handsome young man. It had a most wonderful mechanism showing the calendar back and forth into the past and into the future, showing the time, and intellectual and spiritual figures of history throughout mankind were sculptured around the clock. And whenever the clock struck, these figures exercised most graceful movements.
>
> And everybody, the people and the judges, said that, yes, to accomplish a thing like that was most unbelievable, and the princess looked at the clock and looked at the handsome young man, and she liked them both very much.
>
> The judges were just about to pronounce their formal judgment when a new competitor appeared, a low-brow fellow. He, too, carried something in his hand but it was not a work of art, it was a sledge hammer. He walked up to the clock and he swung out and with three blows he smashed up the clock, and everybody said, why, to smash up such a clock, this was surely the most unbelievable thing.
>
> And that was how the judges had to judge.
>
> And this is relevant to the present situation at Harvard. It is now 100 years since President Eliot started converting what, after all, was an obscure college into a great university, the greatest university in the land. What has taken 100 years to create can be destroyed in as many weeks. This university, like the clock in the story, like all great works of art, is a frail and fragile creation, however beautiful, and unless you do something about it, and unless you let the administration do something about it, this wonderful work of art will be destroyed and the guilt will be yours.

Our organization is a wonderful work of art. It has been put together. If destroyed, it will never be put together again. To each of us goes the responsibility of seeing that it is the clock that survives and not the sledge hammer.

[Prolonged standing ovation]

The Good Old Days

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Bal Harbour, Florida / August 1976

In my office is a copy of the *American School Board Journal,* from about a year ago. The front page of the *School Board Journal*—it is kind of a nostalgic issue—the front page reproduces a line drawing from an issue during the Depression, and it shows a president of a school board as the captain of a ship and steering the ship through the cloudy, stormy weather and seas.

Then, as you look through the inside of this issue, there is a headline across two pages that asks, "Can you remember the good old days when teachers' salaries were cut and they were unable to do anything about it?"

That headline in that issue of the *School Board Journal* is a pretty good summary of where we stand today. Problems are very great, but never again will there be a time when school boards can do that kind of thing without getting a very, very good fight, and frequently a successful one.

[Applause]

Teacher Unity—Whether It Takes 5 Years or 60

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Bal Harbour, Florida / August 1976

Right now prospects for teacher unity are not very optimistic, but I can say something and I hope that all of you will agree with me. No matter how many times the NEA talks about its nonnegotiable demands and how important it is for teachers to keep fighting each other and about professionalism—no matter how much it talks about that, I want to come back here year after year, whether it takes three or five or twenty or fifty or sixty years, and say over and over again that we are willing to sit down at the bargaining table and talk about it and we are willing to compromise because there is no reason the teachers of this country should not be united and strong. We are going to work for that no matter what the NEA position is at the present time.

Labor Law Reform

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Boston, Massachusetts / August 1977

We have before us at this convention a number of key problems and issues.... The first of these major concerns deals with labor law reform. I am sure that, whenever I go to a teacher meeting and start talking about labor law reform, generally the people in the audience feel, "Well, here we are, Al has been sent on a mission by the labor movement to do something for somebody else." So, I want to say that if we manage to get the labor laws of this country reformed, we will have done the greatest single thing we could do to bring about massive improvements in education in this country.

This connection is not far-fetched at all. First, let's take a look at where teachers have the right to organize. Where do we have the right to bargain collectively; where do we spend more on a public school system? If you take a look at those states in this country where we have organization, where we have public support, and where we have legislation that is good for education, those are places where there is a labor movement. Show me a place where teachers still don't have collective bargaining and still don't have any rights: Those are the states that do not have a labor movement.

In helping to develop laws that will enable those workers who want to organize to do so, we are building a political atmosphere that will help teachers as well.

I remember not many years ago, in the mid-1950s, when I was active as a volunteer in what was then the New York Teachers' Guild, we had a newspaper. It came out once a month, a four-page printed newspaper called *The Guild Bulletin.* Most of the members of the New York Teacher's Guild at that time—which amounted to about 5 percent of the teachers in the city—wanted the newspaper delivered to them in a plain, unmarked envelope, sent to their homes. One of my contributions in organizing that local was to ask members to distribute the union newspaper in schools, to put it in the school mail boxes so that someone would publicly acknowledge that he or she was a union member.

Now, if that kind of fear existed in the city of New York, *the* labor town in this country, then what kind of fear exists in North Carolina, South Carolina—I am certain I am going to miss a state—Virginia, etc.? We are in one of the few democratic countries in the world

The Free Period

Where We Stand may have been Al's most famous column, but it wasn't his first. In the late 1950s, when he was a junior high school math teacher and a volunteer for the Teachers Guild, Al wrote a column called The Free Period for the Guild's monthly tabloid, the Guild Bulletin. *The column was reportedly one of the most popular, talked-about features of the newspaper.*

Here are some excerpts from Free Period columns that appeared in 1958-1959. They are a series of short takes on subjects that are still familiar—overcrowded classrooms, attracting qualified teachers, merit pay, bureaucratic administration, and the importance of teacher unity. Also familiar is Al's wonderful sense of humor, his sharp eye for the irrational and absurd.

The Board has issued a booklet to new teachers called *Getting Acquainted*. It's full of useful information on teacher absences, maternity leaves, pensions, and the like. There is a page on the Staff Relations Plan which the Board has not yet recognized, and it ends with a bold "DON'T BE DISCOURAGED." These last words would make a good title for another pamphlet to be given to new teachers after they find out that substitutes do not receive sick pay, that they have been sent to schools where juvenile delinquency is a major problem, that they are subject to a medieval personnel system. In short, give out a new inspirational message whenever a teacher finds that what he thought was a difficult job is really an impossible one.

But we can be comforted by the fact that things are pretty much the same all over the world. The Russians no longer kill their purged leaders...they send them off to be teachers.

Acting as though there were an abundance of teachers, Dr. Theobold exploded the bombshell of merit ratings. *The New York Times* supported him in the faith that supervisors could distinguish good teaching from bad. Probably neither had read the results of a recent experiment with one-hundred principals all rating the same teacher. Thirteen said she was the best they had seen; thirteen said she was the poorest.

Already the effects are clear. When one teacher asked another for advice on how to introduce her class to Julius Ceasar the reply was, "Why should I tell you? I want the merit rating!"

Recent reports of a teacher accused of working with a vice-ring brings to mind a similar story of some years back. When the young lady was asked why she carried on her vice activities alongside teaching she answered that, "In addition to teaching I wanted to have professional status." Asked why she did not join the Guild to help bring professional status to teachers she added, "I wouldn't think of that...everyone knows that joining unions is immoral!"

The shortage of teachers in N.Y.C. continues to be a major problem. *The New York Times* reported that the Board of Ed will meet this problem with a special public relations campaign. Advertising is a good thing, but before one goes about it, he should make sure that he has a good product to sell. What can the advertisers say about N.Y.C.? That we pay the lowest minimum salary required by state law? That, in addition to the other difficulties of teaching here, the prospective teacher is faced with longer hours? That our city is the only major city in the nation that has not granted a general salary increase in the past two years? That neighboring communities have higher salaries, better working conditions and more favorable retirement laws? Perhaps these questions should not discourage the Board. After all, if Madison Avenue could help the cigarette companies convince the American public that cancer was good for them, it may yet sell some prospective teachers on a career in N.Y.C.

Bob Klein had a nightmare in which he read the following ad on the School Page: We are forming a new teacher organization!!! The Upper Manhattan All-Girl Junior High School Married Men Teachers Assn. Membership excluded all others—TU, Guild, TA, HSTA, MET, K-6B, JCTO, JATO, NATO, and XYZ. The goal of the UMAGJHSMMTA is teacher unity.

One principal did not allow a teacher to place Guild literature in teachers' letter boxes. The principal argued that some teachers might not want to receive the literature! The principal was in the wrong. The Guild and all other recognized organizations have a right to use the letter boxes. Teachers who don't want the literature have a right to throw it away.

that does not have 98 percent, or 95 percent, or 90 percent of the workers organized; we have only about 25 percent. Why aren't they organized? Is it that the workers in the United States don't want unions? Is it that they don't want contracts or grievance procedures or higher salaries? It is not that at all.

Take a look at J. P. Stevens. The workers petition for a union and the factory closes up and moves to another state. By the way, that is good reason for passing labor law reform. A lot of these factories in these Southern states that needed tough labor laws moved from your states, from my state. We lost the taxes for education those companies would have provided. It is about time we told the industries within our states that, if they move South, they are going to have labor laws down there that are just as good as the ones we have up here.

[Applause]

There is another reason why I say labor law reform is the greatest single thing we can do to promote the cause of education in this country. Go to the Congress of the United States and try to get a good piece of legislation out of the Senate. You need 60 percent of the votes to prevent a filibuster—not 50 percent of the votes, but 60.

National polls show that the public favors welfare reform; the public favors tax reform; the public favors a national health security program; the public favors increased aid to education. It may not be too difficult to get a majority in the Congress to support these measures, but it is very difficult to get 60 percent.

What group is it in the Senate of the United States that is able to hold up this legislation? Where do they come from? Why do they always come back with the same attitudes? The answer is they come from states where the Right-to-Work committees prevail, where there isn't very much of a labor movement. If we could build the same strength in the labor movement in those states, we would be able to permanently shift that margin in the Congress of the United States. That would make the difference between going home from each session of Congress having gotten a few things but having missed out on most of the big ones. It might even mean finally being able to make some very major breakthroughs. A strong labor movement in just two or three of those states would bring us four or six senators who would have different views from those who come from those states now.

So, this is the first priority—labor law reform—because it is not just to help workers organize—of course, that would be great. It is not just to help teachers organize—that will happen, too. It is to help each and every one of us prevent the erosion of the economies within our own states, and it is also to change the entire politics of the Congress of the United States so that we can have a better chance of putting through the legislation we need.

Finding Hope in One Another

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Boston, Massachusetts / August 1977

Last year and the year before, those of you who spoke to delegates from New York City found that those delegates who usually come here a happy, optimistic crew were very despondent. They were faced with thousands and thousands of layoffs. They were faced with their colleagues leaving; with class size soaring; with large-scale contract violations; and with the question of whether the city itself would go bankrupt and whether everything—the school system, pensions, contracts, collective bargaining—might disappear. If it disappeared in New York, it would not be New York alone. I know that all of you throughout the country have faced at one time or another in the last year or two a school superintendent, or a school board member, or a legislator, or a governor, or a mayor who said, "Well, we are not going to give you that because we don't want to go down the way New York City is about to go down." New York was about to be used as the excuse for every single anti-labor character in the country to mistreat his employees.

Well, there is a difference now. New York didn't go down. New York City's teachers played a major role working with banks; a major role in providing investment funds for the city; a major role in putting the city back on its feet. This year New York City teachers, as a result of their political influence, were able to get the salary increases that were negotiated in 1975.

[Applause]

We were able to get a court decision so that the fines that were supposed to have been $5 million were reduced to $50,000.

[Applause]

We now have a decision from the federal court declaring that taking the check-off away from some unions to punish them, but not others, is a violation of the Constitution of the United States and will not be endorsed.

[Applause]

We have seen thousands of our laid-off colleagues returning and the restoration of many of the improvements in working conditions that had been taken away.

It is important to look at that experience because Philadelphia is now being hit with the same kind of crisis. Bob Healey had to leave the convention today to return to Chicago because of problems there. I hope that it doesn't happen, but I know that many of you will, in this next year or two, face some very tough and dark moments, similar to what teachers in New York City faced. There will be moments when for the first

time in years your members, who at this moment have this great faith in their union organization, will turn around and say, "What good is the union, what good is the contract when all this is happening?"

All the work it took all these years to build will be in danger because an immediate loss of that magnitude leads our members naturally to lose faith in the union collective bargaining process and the political process itself. It is therefore important to have before us an example of those who have returned from the world of the near dead and have begun to feel some sense of optimism and some sense of cheer in terms of their organizational relations....

We are going to have a message to bring back to teachers. It is not going to be a simple message or slogan; it is complex. What we are going to have to bring back is the message that we are living in a tough, complicated world where 10, or 15, or 20 major issues that at this very moment they have no interest in, will decide the future of teachers, the future of collective bargaining, the future of public education in this country.

I am confident that with the work we do, we are going to succeed in the next few years; we are going to get our programs through.

President Shanker Asks for a Dues Increase

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention Washington, D.C. / August 1978

A few months ago, the executive council engaged in a lengthy analysis of our organizing prospects, and we found that there are hundreds of thousands of teachers, some of them in districts we've already organized, some of them in younger locals, many of them in higher education; and there are large numbers of professionals working in hospitals or for state or local agencies as lawyers or librarians. We felt that we needed to make an investment, take a chance, and employ additional organizers and get some money together so that if, in your state, you've got a good opportunity and you call the AFT and say, "Look, we've got a good chance of doing something here, but we don't have the wherewithal, we need your help," we won't be sitting here in Washington saying, "Sorry, we don't have it."

So we have just adopted a budget that is in deficit; we are budgeting a deficit of approximately $1 million for this coming year. We expect that part of that deficit will be made up by the fact that, with more staff and more money and more programs, we will be organizing more members, and, therefore, we will have a greater income.

But all of us know that organizing is not something that pays off in five minutes or in one day or in one month. Just think of how long it took your local to get established and how long it took to get collective bargaining and how long it took to build a majority.

So we will probably be coming back here next year, and I wish to put everyone on notice in terms of our problems, in terms of our prospects, and also in terms of our competition.

As long as the NEA puts more and more money into campaigns against us, we will surely not win unless our resources are comparable.

Therefore, next year we expect that we will be back here, and one of the items on our agenda will be a consideration for an increase in our per capita.

Now, look around this hall. Many of us are from locals that were very small five years ago, ten, 15 years ago, and 20 years ago—very small and struggling.

And at some time in the life of each and every one of us—I know it was true for us in New York City, which I remind you was a small local in 1960, and '61 and '62—there was an opportunity to organize all of the teachers where we were, to stop being a minority, and to engage in collective bargaining. There are very few of us who did it by ourselves. In New York City, we didn't do it by ourselves—I remember a convention of the AFT much smaller than this, where the big debate was, should we give New York City, or lend New York City, $50,000? And it was quite a debate. Both at the council and at the convention. That investment turned out to be a very good one. And there was help from locals across the country.

Well, I think that all of us who come from large locals and successful states should realize that sitting in this room are people from locals that are just like the locals that they were part of 10 and 15 years ago. These people are courageous; they are in parts of the country where it's not very popular to be in the union. There are people sitting in this room who have lost their jobs as a result of union activity and who are waiting to get their jobs back, to rebuild their unions, and make them greater. They are here, many of them, at their own expense.

I know the executive council believes that those of us in locals and state federations that have made it just have to think back a very short period of time, to when we had to rely on those who were successful, and I am sure that when next year comes, and we have to pay for the programs that are going to help our brothers and sisters who are just beginning to build—help them reach the same success that the rest of us have achieved—that we're going to come back and we're going to approve whatever it takes to give them the help to build the unions they need in their parts of the country.

George Meany

Convention Proceedings
Washington, D.C. / August 1978

President Shanker: President Meany, I think there are at least two surprises in this convention hall. One is that most of the teachers sitting out there at one time in their careers never would have dreamt that they would be members of a labor union; and the other one is that maybe you never dreamt that there would be a union of teachers this size and this strong and this much a part of the American labor movement.

We are very happy to have President Meany with us today. He has not been at a previous convention because at this time of the year, two things happen: President Meany has a birthday *[applause]* and there is usually a plumbers convention.

This is a good occasion for us to spend a minute or two thinking about what George Meany means to us and what George Meany means to this country.

We have had labor leaders who are labor leaders and they can be fine leaders and excellent leaders in fulfilling that function, but George Meany's view of the function of a leader of American labor has been unique. It has been a broadening one. It has not been one concerned with mere narrow self-interest, although there is nothing wrong with workers organizing and fighting for their self-interest, since everyone else does.

Under George Meany, the American labor movement has become the spokesman for millions and millions of people who are powerless, who do not have unions. If we look at the social legislation that has been passed throughout the years—and after many bitter struggles—I think we could say that there is not a single piece of that legislation, whether it be minimum wages, whether it be safety standards, whether it be advances in rights to unionize and organize, whether it be health and medical care, whether it be civil rights or the non-acceptance of certain appointees to the Supreme Court, or whether it be leadership in the impeachment of a president of the United States—that would have been accomplished without the strength of the AFL-CIO. These are all issues on which George Meany took the first step.

But George Meany's interests go beyond the borders of this country. For many years he was personally active in Europe—in the various international organizations—and just as he has fought for civil rights and the rights of workers in this country, he has educated Americans to the view that our own freedoms are not safe where others do not enjoy them.

And unlike some who don't like totalitarianism in Chile, but don't say a word about it in Czechoslovakia, George Meany is a giant who has condemned totalitarianism and the refusal of governments to allow free labor movements to exist.

He has done that without being selective. He has condemned those practices on a single standard of morality wherever they exist.

It did not come as a surprise that when Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union, it was on the platform of the AFL-CIO that he chose to make his first statement to the West; or that Vladimir Bukovsky's mother wrote to George Meany when Bukovsky was dying in a Soviet psychiatric prison.

Above all, he has helped us and other public employees with support wherever we have been in trouble. There have also been tremendous efforts on behalf of farm workers. Under George Meany, the labor movement has entered fields in which it never had strength before.

George, we are very happy to have you here. I would like to introduce you to the 2,000 leaders of the American Federation of Teachers.

[Standing ovation]

A Million or More in '84

Convention Proceedings
San Francisco, California / July 1979

These buttons, "A million or More in '84"—one delegate came up to me and he said: "You know, I tried to figure out what that button means, 'A million or more in '84.' I have spent a number of hours on it.

"Last night it just came to me. That is the finest and best salary program you have ever come up with."

[Laughter and applause]

Supreme Court Wrong in Yeshiva Case

Where We Stand / March 2, 1980

The United States Supreme Court decision in the Yeshiva University case was dead wrong and may haunt labor relations for years to come. In 1974 the Yeshiva University Faculty Association, an unaffiliated union, petitioned the National Labor Relations Board seeking to represent full-time faculty at 10 of Yeshiva's 13 schools in collective bargaining. Yeshiva University used a unique argument

in opposing the right of the faculty to be represented by its own union. According to Yeshiva, faculty members are not really employees covered by the labor law. They are really managers and supervisors—bosses of sorts. This was news to the faculty.

The NLRB disagreed with Yeshiva. An election was held, and by secret ballot the Yeshiva faculty voted to be represented by YUFA. Yeshiva refused to bargain with the union. Instead it appealed the decision of the NLRB both within the labor board itself and finally in the federal courts. Last week, Yeshiva won its case in the 5-4 Supreme Court decision.

Justice Powell, writing for the majority, cited the fact that the faculty participates on many committees and makes recommendations "to the dean or director in every case of faculty hiring, tenure, sabbaticals, termination, and promotion. Although the final decision is reached by the central administration on the advice of the dean or director," Powell wrote, "the overwhelming majority of faculty recommendations are implemented."

Powell stated that the labor law was intended to apply to management-employee relations "that prevail in the pyramidal hierarchies of private industry" and not in "mature" private universities where this system of shared authority "evolved from the medieval model of collegial decision making in which guilds of scholars were responsible only to themselves."

Justice Brennan strongly dissented. Brennan argued that the primary decision-making structure is hierarchical, with "authority ... lodged in the administration, and a formal chain of command runs from a lay governing board down through university officers to individual faculty members and students." At the same time there is also a network that allows the faculty members to share their expertise by giving advice to the administration on many matters. While the university may try to follow the faculty's advice, "the University always retains the ultimate decision-making authority...and the administration gives that weight and import to the faculty's collective judgment as it chooses and deems consistent with its own perception of the institution's needs and objectives."

Also, managers are hired, fired, and held accountable for the decisions they make by their effectiveness as *managers.* Faculty members are not evaluated on their committee participation, advice to management, or loyalty to the administration. "Indeed," wrote Justice Brennan, "the notion that a faculty member's professional competence could depend on his undivided loyalty to management is antithetical to the whole concept of academic freedom. Faculty members are judged by their employer on the quality of their teaching and scholarship, not on the compatibility of their advice with administration policy."

The fact that the Yeshiva faculty voted for a union shows that the faculty does not see itself as management. "Indeed, on the precise topics that are specified as mandatory subjects of collective bargaining—wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment—the interests of teacher and administrator are often diametrically opposed," Brennan said, and he charged the court's majority with viewing Yeshiva's faculty through rose-colored glasses. The great medieval university is no more. "The university of today bears little resemblance to the 'community of scholars' of yesteryear. Education has become 'big business,' and the task of operating the university enterprise has been transferred from the faculty to an autonomous administration, which faces the same pressures to cut costs and increase efficiencies that confront any large industrial organization. The past decade of budget cutbacks, declining enrollments, reductions in faculty appointments, curtailment of academic programs, and increasing calls for accountability to alumni and other special interest groups have only added to the erosion of the faculty's role in the institution's decision-making process."

By denying collective bargaining rights under law to the faculty, Justice Brennan wrote, the Court has removed a deterrent to "unreasonable administrative conduct" and has made it more likely that "recurring disputes will fester outside the negotiation process until strikes or other forms of economic warfare occur."

The immediate effect of the decision will be a flood of legal appeals. While the decision applied only to Yeshiva and universities that are similar, the courts and the NLRB will have to decide in each case which universities provide faculty participation sufficient to turn faculty members into bosses and which do not.

The decision may have an impact in private industry. It may be that many of the management consulting firms hired by big business to prevent their workers from unionizing will now have a new weapon. Why not allow workers to participate in committees, to give advice to higher ups—and then argue that they should not be covered by labor law? The decision will also cause problems for a number of liberal reformers who have been trying to change the nature of work in America. Many support a practice that has taken hold in a number of European countries—the idea that employees should be represented on boards of directors and at every level from top to bottom in the decision-making process. Those who advocate that approach here will now have to ask themselves whether giving workers a greater voice in management will not endanger their right to bargain collectively.

The decision will be debated for years to come, but perhaps the most incisive analysis came from AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, who quipped that the relationship of the faculty to Yeshiva was more like that of a fire hydrant to a dog.

Get Interested in Tariff Policies

From "Teacher Unions: Past, Present and Future Influence"
Harvard University Graduate School of Education
March 1980

Politics and education were pretty separate for a long period of time, but in the 1970s something happened that has not yet been fully accepted by the educational community. In the 1970s there appeared, to anybody who wanted to look at it or understand it, a direct link between the state of the economy and education. The NEA, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National PTA—develop your list of organizations and ask yourself, "Have any of these organizations ever taken a position on any of the major national issues: taxation, unemployment insurance, Humphrey-Hawkins, national health security—you name it." The answer is *no.* Why? Well, they say, we are educational organizations; we deal with educational issues; we're apolitical. I was in Michigan early in the 1970s, talking to a group in a place that looked like this, to an audience like this—except the audience there was mostly teachers—and toward the end of the evening, somebody asked a question—it was obviously going to be the last question of the evening. They said, "Mr. Shanker, we are Michigan teachers. You're about to leave. What do you think we ought to be most concerned with?" I was kind of tired and I was a bit flip and I said, "I think you ought to be most interested in tariff policies."

First they looked and then they laughed, and I said, "Now look, I know it's late in the evening and it sounded as though I was just trying to be flip about this, but think about it. You've got a huge oil industry in this state. One of the things that teachers and school board members and others in the education community do not understand is that we get our money from taxes; and taxes depend on the productivity of the private sector. The private sector in this state is going to be very much affected by an inflow of foreign cars." This was before the energy crisis, so I didn't talk about energy. But I said, "What happens to education is going to depend on a great many issues that none of you have ever bothered to think about as teacher unionists or as school board members, and I can't think of any other group in this country that is as divorced in its thinking and concern about the source of its money as are people in education. We think that because we're in a noble field, that somehow it will flow."

Well, it's too bad; a few years later there were all these workers in Michigan who were laid off, but even after the 1970s, with the layoffs of school teachers, with bankruptcy or near-bankruptcy of school systems, with schools shut down for periods of time, we still do not see the major education organizations in this country taking any positions on the economic issues that would make a difference.

Accidents that Created a Union

From "Teacher Unions:
Past, Present and Future Influence"
Harvard University Graduate School of Education
March 1980

We are so accustomed to picking up newspapers or listening to the media, watching and hearing talk about the negotiations or the lobbying of teacher groups, that most of us have a feeling that this was always so. Actually, the development of teacher unions is a very recent phenomenon in this country. It was not until the very late 1950s in New York City that the teachers' union decided to move toward collective bargaining.... If you want to ask the question, "Why is it that all of a sudden a teachers' union decided that it should behave like a union and really be a union?" There were a number of accidents of the time. One of them was the fact that two of the subways in New York City—the IRT and the BMT, which used to be private railroads—went bankrupt and the city had to buy them or take them over because it had to maintain those mass transit facilities. And once the city took them over, it took them over together with the union that was there. It was similar to the nationalization of various industries in European countries after World War II, where...all of a sudden you had government involved in a collective bargaining relationship that it had not engaged in before. So teachers and other public employees in New York City said, "Well, they're government employees. If they can do it, why can't we?" Of course, another event of the period that was very important was the development of the civil rights movement, especially the activities of Dr. King, and the notion that public employees might strike was against the law. Franklin Roosevelt had made strong statements—you don't have to go to Cal Coolidge. Roosevelt was pretty tough and so were other relatively liberal and pro-labor politicians. But what the civil rights movement of that period did was to raise the issue of whether it was not a proper thing to violate the law on occasion, if it was for a good purpose. And the combination of the subway workers' having these rights, so that obviously it was not illegal or impossible, and the example of the great esteem in which many held the violations of law—civil disobedi-

ence—in the civil rights movement, those two provided a very strong background for the development of teacher unionism.

Keeping an Eye on the White House

Convention Proceedings
Detroit, Michigan / August 1980

["Hail to the Chief"]

Announcer: The President of the United States.

[The delegates arose, applauded, cheered and whistled as the President of the United States entered the room.]

[President Carter shook hands with some delegates as the AFT Escort Committee accompanied the President to the podium.]

[Applause and cheers continuing]

[President Carter greeted members of the AFT Executive Council.]

President Shanker: Mr. President, your visit here today is very special. You are the first president of the United States to visit a convention of the American Federation of Teachers.

[Prolonged applause and cheers]

I guess that tells us something about ourselves and how far we have come, and it tells us something about you and your concern for us.

[Applause]

We have quite a number of foreign guests here—and also I think quite a few of our own delegates—who have raised questions about this confusing relationship that we have. We are on the same side a good part of the time and, at other times, we have some pretty tough fights.

I am reminded of some years ago when I was in Washington for an AFT conference. I had a few hours before the conference began. I took my oldest son Adam for a walk and we walked by the AFL-CIO building.

I said, "Adam, would you like to go in there?"

And he said, "Sure."

We went in and I picked up the phone to see if George Meany was upstairs.

He said, "Come on up."

I said, "George, this is a social visit. I have my seven-year-old son with me."

He said, "Come on up."

He took Adam over to the window that, as you know, looks down at the White House.

[Laughter and applause]

George said, "Adam, do you know why the president of the AFL-CIO has this office up here with this window?"

Adam said, "No."

George Meany said, "It is because whoever represents workers always has to keep an eye on what is going on down there."

[Cheers, laughter, and applause]

We can be very proud, as we watch the tragic events in Poland, that we have a country where government is expected to act like government and labor is expected to act like labor.

Mr. President, we are here to give you our enthusiastic support, but we intend to continue watching what goes on in the White House *[laughter]* and as usual, we will express our views in a forthright manner.

[Standing ovation accompanied by laughter and cheers]

What I'm Proudest Of

From "A Great Union Celebrates a Milestone"
Where We Stand / December 15, 1985

Interviewers often ask what I'm proudest of. There are many things that come to mind—helping to build a great union (now 85,000 strong in New York City), helping teachers win a solid voice in their own destiny, playing a role in the American labor movement, speaking for freedom here and everywhere in the world. But if I had to pick one thing, I'd say it's this: organizing classroom paraprofessionals and negotiating for them not only better salaries and benefits (including, finally, pensions) but a career ladder that enables each of them to go to college and, by virtue of their own hard work, to become teachers...and join the struggle of teachers to improve their profession.

In 1969, when the UFT sought to represent paraprofessionals, we had just come off a long and bitter strike over Ocean Hill-Brownsville, with a divisive racial component. The "paras" were mostly minority women, hired by local districts with antipoverty funds...but with low salaries, no benefits, no job security. Nobody but a few of us believed we could win the election. When the ballots were counted, it was some 300 paraprofessionals in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, hired by our recent adversaries, who put us over the top. It was a very moving vote of confidence.

The paras have done us proud. Thousands have become teachers, many with master's degrees, a few on their way to the Ph.D. Many thousands more are in the pipeline. And those who choose to remain paraprofessionals perform a needed and vital service in the classroom. They have strengthened our union and our schools immeasurably.

The AFFT

From remarks to the Texas Federation of Teachers Convention
Corpus Christi / June 1987

Every day I go into a hotel or airport, and every day somebody says, "Hi, Al." And I turn around, and I want to see if I know that person, maybe it's a relative. The person says, "You don't know me. I used to be a teacher." Nobody ever says, "Hi, Al, I used to be a surgeon." *[Laughter]*

The whole country is full of ex-teachers. A couple of years ago, I thought of quitting as president of the AFT and starting a new organization called the American Federation of Former Teachers. It would be just loaded with people.

From 106 Teacher Organizations to One

From remarks to the Rochester Teachers Association Leadership Conference
Rochester, New York / Fall 1988

I find it very helpful as I think about all the obstacles that we encounter to think back to some other so-called hopeless situation that turned out not to be hopeless, even though no one could've predicted that it would come out the way it eventually did.

One of the biggest problems we had was that in 1960, there were 106 teacher organizations in New York City, one for each division, each religion, each race, and for each grievance. There was a group called the Sixth and Seventh Grade Woman Teachers' Association of Bensonhurst. Something had happened at some point and they started an organization. No, no joke. There was also a group that tried to bring them all together called the Joint Committee of Teacher Organizations. Our organization was one of the 106. Now, believe it or not, in those days in New York City, teachers thought that you were better off if you did not have one organization for all the teachers because if you had one organization, it would neglect their specific concern or issue. They said, "One organization is not really going to listen to me." And so, when I went to schools to talk to teachers, they'd say, "Well, we only have 300 members in our organization so we can be effective." I would say, "What? In a city with 50,000 teachers you're going to be effective with just a handful of teachers?" They'd say, "Sure, look at how expensive it is to give something to everybody. As a small group we're going to just ask for something for ourselves. It's a lot cheaper." That's the kind of thinking we had to fight.

There was a historic opportunity, as it turned out, in 1960-61. Everything that happened there could've happened a different way. It could've happened that the teachers would vote against collective bargaining. Now, if New York City teachers had voted against collective bargaining, that would've been it. People would have said, "Right here in the labor center of the world, where they have a right to have an election, the teachers themselves turned it down." That would've been the end of it.

Now once the teachers voted and we were elected, there were lots of unanswered questions because no one had ever negotiated for public employees. We weren't experienced; no one was experienced in this field. Did we have a right to a written agreement? Did the government have a right to enter into such an agreement? Did the government have the right to enter into more than a one-year contract, given the fact that budgets are only for one year and school boards change? Did the government have the right to say that an impartial arbitrator will resolve a grievance that may result in the expenditure of taxpayers' money? Would it be legal? Constitutional? Could it be done?

As we went into collective bargaining, we didn't know the answers to these questions. But there are certain times when grabbing an opportunity can make a tremendous difference for everybody. Had we gone into negotiations and settled for a memorandum of understanding, a resolution of the board—things short of a contract—had we settled on an agreement that had no arbitration in it because we accepted the idea that the government cannot submit itself to impartial arbitration—whatever we did at that point would be the precedent for the rest of the country. Fortunately, what we did turned out to be pretty good and set a pattern that created genuine collective bargaining over time. It's also important to note that it took about 15 years before most teachers accepted the concept. And there are still debates today in Texas and Mississippi and elsewhere as to whether collective bargaining is the right thing for teachers. It's not over yet! It's over for the majority, but it's still not over for some.

Becoming a Pension Expert

Taped interview with Albert Shanker
October 1990

I would get to as many school meetings as I could once I became a full-time national field representative in 1959, but it was very hard to get teachers to invite you at that time. After all, questions of unionism were not exactly burning issues. But about the time that I

was hired, there was a change in the pension law. It allowed teachers to choose an option so they could retire after 30 years instead of 35 years. However, in order to choose the 30-year option, the teacher had to change the rate of contribution. As I went to my first few schools and sat in the office getting questions from people in the schools, I realized that they didn't understand how the pension system worked. So I went to some union people who knew the system and learned as much as I could about it—not in a technical way, but basically about how it worked. Then, I sent letters to every one of the 1,000 schools saying that Al Shanker, a new staff member working for the New York Teachers Guild, was a pension expert. The letter went on to say that the largest sum of money teachers were ever likely to collect in their lives was their pension. And the changes that they made in it would affect their future livelihood, and so forth.

As a result, I got hundreds of requests to come to schools, and I developed a 20- to 25-minute talk about how the pension system worked, which turned out to be a very good lesson. In most of these schools, the teachers said, "Now I understand how it works. I never understood before."

It also happened, at about that time, that there was a very significant union victory in the pension field. New York City and New York state teachers had been sent a letter telling them that they would get a lower pension than they had expected when they joined the system because the mortality tables had been changed.

Our union had gone to court. We hired a major constitutional attorney, who argued that the New York State Constitution says public employee pensions constitute a contract between the state and its employees that may not be diminished or impaired. So changing mortality tables after teachers had gotten into the system was a violation of the contract. And we had won.

The case was a $40 million victory, just for New York City, and in the state it was something like $50 million. So after explaining the workings of the pension system to these teachers in the schools, I pointed out that we had just won this big fight for them. Even if the union did nothing but fight for their pensions and act as a watch dog, the $18 a year in dues would be well worth it to protect their hundreds of thousands of dollars in investments. Of course, once I was there, I was able to answer questions about things like why teachers don't have a duty-free lunch period and talk about why I joined the union. And that became the way in which I got into a large number of schools—as a pension person.

Then, of course, afterward when we had other issues such as salaries or collective bargaining or the staff relations plan, I would write letters to schools telling them to invite Al Shanker; he'll speak to you on this issue, whatever happened to be the hot issue of the day.

The Hamlet, N.C., Fire

Where We Stand / January 5, 1992

When I was growing up, the Triangle Shirt Waist fire was still vivid in people's memories. I often heard my mother, a garment worker and an ardent trade unionist, talk about how 150 workers, most of them young women, were killed in that fire. Many of them died struggling to escape through exit doors that were locked from the outside because the factory owners were afraid of workers' stealing the garments. Others were killed as they jumped from windows to get away from the flames. That fire was 80 years ago, and most people thought nothing like it could ever happen again. It was part of a bygone era before there were unions and health and safety laws to protect workers and inspectors to enforce the laws. But we were wrong—as we found out with the Imperial Food Products fire in Hamlet, N.C.

Last September 3, a fire broke out near the deep-fat fryer in Imperial's chicken-processing plant and spread quickly through the one-story building. The plant had no windows and no sprinkler or fire alarm system. And workers who got to the unmarked fire exits found some of them locked from the outside. Imperial's management was using the same "loss control" technique as the bosses at Triangle Shirt Waist—and with the same results. Twenty-five of the 90-odd employees working at the time were killed, suffocated by the black smoke that filled the plant, and 55 more were injured.

What about the workplace health and safety laws that should have protected these workers? What about the inspectors? When states have budget crises and cut back on their services, few people are concerned if some state employees get laid off and some positions go unfilled. People tend to think of these employees as bureaucrats who are not doing anything much. They don't think that many of them provide crucial services—like inspecting workplaces to see if they are safe.

That was part of the problem in North Carolina. The state Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) had only 22 safety inspectors and 13 health inspectors—reduced from the 77 required by law. Imperial's chicken-processing plant should have been well up on their list anyway: It was one of 3,213 (out of 180,000) North Carolina workplaces in the "high hazard" category, and there had already been a fire there in 1984. But given the level of staffing and the work schedule at North Carolina OSHA, it would have taken the agency 30 years to check out all the "high hazard" workplaces. No one ever got around to inspecting the plant in Hamlet.

As for the union, North Carolina is a state whose right-to-work laws discourage unionization, so the workers at Imperial didn't have one. Of course, they

could have complained anyway. But ask yourself how likely that was. The majority of Imperial's workers were poor women—and many were single mothers—who worked at or slightly above the minimum wage. Most of them probably had no idea that Imperial was breaking the law and that there was a government agency to which they could complain. But even if they had known, there are few jobs in Hamlet, and unemployment there is high. Employees knew the company would have no trouble replacing them if they made trouble. And how many would take a chance of losing the only job they were likely to get?

The other day, the North Carolina Department of Labor hit Imperial Food Products with more than $800,000 in civil fines, citing 54 "willful" safety violations, 23 "serious" violations, and 6 "other-than-serious" violations in the Hamlet plant. You can call this good news because it is the biggest fine for violations of this kind ever levied in North Carolina. On the other hand, it seems a ridiculously small fine for operating a plant under conditions that killed 25 people. Does it send a serious message to other companies that put their profits above the safety of their employees? Are workers in North Carolina's other nonunionized workplaces much safer now?

It's fashionable to say that unions aren't necessary anymore. They were important in the bad old days when individual workers were helpless and subject to exploitation by unscrupulous bosses. Nowadays, employers are said to be more enlightened. And if they aren't, a worker can take advantage of our enlightened labor laws to complain about working conditions that are unfair or dangerous. That sounds good, but the reality is not that simple.

Even good labor laws are no protection if the government can't afford to hire people to enforce them—or if the punishment meted out to offenders is little more than a reprimand. It's also true that even good laws are not self-enforcing. They won't work unless employees complain about infringements. But how many people would be willing to risk their jobs by calling an inspector to a workplace where there's no union? And, without the support of a union, how many are wealthy—or crazy—enough to challenge an employer to get their rights under the law?

My mother also used to say that some bosses were monsters but most were not. Bosses made their money by saving a penny here and a penny there. And if they ignored some safety precautions, that was often because the possibility of an accident seemed remote while the likelihood of making a profit was right there. That didn't make all bosses evil, she said, but it did mean that workers needed unions to protect their interests. Most workers still need that protection. The 80 years between the Triangle Shirt Waist fire and the tragedy in Hamlet, N.C., have changed many things, but that's not one of them.

The Pool

Convention Proceedings
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania / August 1992

Just as you were giving that introduction I was handed a note that says, "Dear Al, please limit your speech to 57 minutes...

[Laughter]

... because as a single mother I need the pool money to pay for two college tuitions."

[Laughter with applause]

Well, I'll try, but I do it from rough notes. So I can't be sure.

Roll the Union On

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
Anaheim, California / July 1994

I'd like to start with where our union has come from and where we are as a result of our efforts over the last two years.

You know that most of the labor movement has been in decline, but the AFT is one of a handful of unions that, year after year—and this year is no exception—is bigger and stronger than before.

[Applause]

We just passed 850,000 members and grew more than 56,000 since our last convention.

[Applause]

When you take into account the tremendous amount of turnover, the retirements, the people who pass away, people who just decide to leave teaching for some other job or profession, this means that to grow by 56,000 and to reach this number, we had to sign up more than 2,000 members every week over the last two years. Now, that growth has taken place in all sectors, K–12 teachers, higher education, school-related personnel, health care, state and local government workers, and retirees.

We had 200 representational elections since our last convention, and out of the 200 we won 164 all over the country.

[Applause]

This is a win rate of more than 80 percent. Again, among the top one, two, or three unions in the AFL-CIO.

As you know, we start generally with a few active members and we go into an election, but within those bargaining units there are more than 27,000 potential members—again, in every sector. We're continuing to grow in states like Texas, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Mississippi, which do not have collective bargaining rights by law; and we have to struggle much harder in those states just to have a union, let alone to get collec-