

DEMOCRACY'S CHAMPION



ALBERT SHANKER

and the International Impact of the
American Federation of Teachers

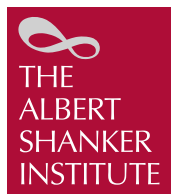
By Eric Chenoweth



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The institute brings together influential leaders and thinkers from business, labor, government, and education from across the political spectrum. It sponsors research, promotes discussions, and seeks new and workable approaches to the issues that will shape the future of democracy, education, and unionism. Many of these conversations are off-the-record, encouraging lively, honest debate and new understandings.

These efforts are directed by and accountable to a diverse and distinguished board of directors representing the richness of Al Shanker's commitments and concerns.

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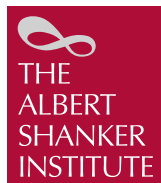
FRONT COVER PHOTO: Albert Shanker speaking at the Wiktor Alter-Henryk Erlich Ceremony in Warsaw in April 1988. Credit: Dementi

DEMOCRACY'S CHAMPION

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By Eric Chenoweth



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Chenoweth is co-director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe, which he founded with Irena Lasota in 1985. He also helped found and direct the Committee in Support of Solidarity in 1981. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) supported and worked closely with both organizations. From 1987 to 1991, Mr. Chenoweth worked in the international affairs department of the American Federation of Teachers, where he focused on human rights and education for democracy projects, including many initiatives in Eastern Europe. After working briefly for the AFL-CIO, he returned to the Institute, where he has carried out programs in Yugoslavia, southeastern Europe, Belarus, the Caucasus, and Cuba. Since 2005, Mr. Chenoweth has also worked as a consultant for the Albert Shanker Institute and Freedom House and co-authored the contents of DemWeb.com, a joint project of the two organizations.

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I am grateful also to Richard Kahlenberg, the author of Shanker's definitive biography and an enthusiastic supporter of an additional monograph to describe more fully this important but not as well known area of the former AFT president's life. He provided not only his time and support but also invaluable advice to the project. Eadie Shanker, Al's wife and partner of nearly four decades, was unstinting in her time, efforts, assistance, and friendship. Dan Golodner, the archivist of the AFT's and Albert Shanker's collection at Wayne State University's Walter Reuther Library in Detroit, as well as its fine staff, should be commended for the fine work they do in keeping American labor history alive and relevant. My respect and appreciation go to them and the staffs at the Tamiment Library at New York University and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung archives in Bonn, which hold the collections of the United Federation of Teachers and International Federation of Free Teachers Unions, respectively.

As much as the written record, this monograph relies on the living memories of those who worked with Albert Shanker and followed him on his many international projects and endeavors to support democracy and workers' rights. I thank all of those who shared their time, memories, and insights and helped to correct any mistakes in the record, especially: George Altomare, John Cole, Paul Cole, Antonia Cortese, Tom Donahue, Rita Freedman, Mary Hatwood Futrell, Tom Hobart, Rachelle Horowitz, Eugenia Kemble, Greg Humphrey, Lorretta Johnson, Jack Joyce, Phil Kugler, Nat Lacour, Irena Lasota, Herb Magidson, Jay Mazur, Ed McElroy, and Ruth Wattenberg. Two colleagues in Albert Shanker's international work deserve special mention and thanks for their generous time and support: David Dorn, former long-time director of the AFT's International Affairs Department, and Fred van Leeuwen, president of Education International, IFFTU's successor organization.

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“The very idea of unionism is solidarity. It means, ‘I’m not strong enough to do things alone. I’ve got to band together with brothers and sisters.’ And you can’t just do that with teachers. You’re not strong enough. And so you are in a general labor movement with other workers. And pretty soon you realize the same thing is true on a worldwide basis.”

Albert Shanker

1

A LIFE OF CONSEQUENCE

Anti-Semitism was rife in the poor, crowded neighborhood in Queens, New York, where Albert Shanker, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, grew up. The hostile atmosphere—including a near-fatal attack by boys his own age and ever-present shouts of “Jew-boy”—led the young Shanker to live a largely solitary life, one that allowed him to pursue hobbies and devour newspapers, publications, and books of all types. Shanker escaped his unwelcoming environment and opened his mind to a grand variety of subjects, authors, and locales.¹ Through his extensive reading, Shanker vicariously traveled the breadth of the earth and engaged himself in the world’s great events. At the time, he had little inkling that he too would actually play a significant role on the world stage, taking part in some of his era’s most contentious political struggles for freedom.

Of course, Albert Shanker (1928-1997) is known mainly for his successful struggle to obtain collective bargaining for teachers, his leadership of teacher unions, and his championship of education reform. Certainly, as a labor leader, he had few rivals in a career that spanned forty years. A “quicksilver intellect” with an “iron-will in battle,”² Shanker built large and powerful city, state, and national unions of teachers and other public employees that still stand as models both for union democracy and worker representation. During his period of active leadership, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) grew from a membership of 65,000 in 1960 to nearly one million teachers, school employees, professors, public employees, and other professionals in 1997, making it one of the largest affiliates of the AFL-CIO. (The AFT has since grown to 1.5 million members.) Drawing on his authority as a teacher union leader, Shanker also took a leading role in advocating for the reform and improvement of public education in the United States. He challenged the education establishment to adopt the innovative changes needed to improve schools, and his own members to accept radical changes to union contracts aimed at helping the children they served. Presidents, governors, legislators, school chancellors, and most anyone involved in education sought Shanker’s advice and counsel. His ideas remain the basis for many education reform initiatives today.³

These twin achievements of Shanker, as a trade union leader and an education reformer, have tended to overshadow a third realm of accomplishment: his international work in the cause of free trade unions, human rights, and democracy. The Albert Shanker Institute commissioned this monograph to describe Shanker’s international work more fully than has been available until now.⁴ It profiles a multifaceted leader whose

¹ Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 17-25, and Jack Schierenbeck, “Class Struggles: The UFT Story: Al Shanker’s Rise to Power, Part 8,” January 13, 1997, 2-3, UFT website, www.uft.org.

² Obituary of Albert Shanker, *New York Times*, February 24, 1997, national edition.

³ See, for example, “Legacy of Education Reformer Albert Shanker Discussed at Forum,” *Headlines*, Harvard Graduate School of Education, November 13, 2007. In the article, Harvard Professor Susan Moore Johnson is quoted as saying that, “It’s just stunning to lay out, one after another, these reforms that were his ideas.”

⁴ Kahlenberg’s *Tough Liberal*, the authoritative biography of Shanker, focuses on the first two pillars of Shanker’s life, labor and education. A good summary of Shanker’s international work during the 1980s appears in Chapter 13.

comprehensive worldview involved him and the union in the important international challenges of his times, and—as a consequence—helped to bring about substantial democratic change and the end of the Cold War.

. . .

Shanker's involvement in international affairs was based on what one former staff member called "Al's total belief in democracy and freedom."⁵ The idea at the core of his total belief was freedom of association: the right of workers everywhere in the world (including professional employees) to organize trade unions of their choosing and to bargain collectively with their employer. Indeed, trade union organizing was his first and last mission—starting in 1953, when he joined the New York Teachers Guild, until his death in February 1997 at age 68. Integral to his belief in unions was Shanker's view that the wellbeing of American workers, including his own members, was inextricably tied to the broader American labor movement, represented by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). It was, in his view, the "most democratic and progressive force for achieving great social change in the United States."⁶

In turn, Shanker believed that the American labor movement's fate was tied to the international trade union movement and free worker movements abroad. As Shanker explained:

The very idea of unionism is solidarity. It means, "I'm not strong enough to do things alone. I've got to band together with brothers and sisters." And you can't just do that with teachers. You're not strong enough. And so you are in a general labor movement with other workers. And pretty soon you realize the same thing is true on a worldwide basis.⁷

Another fundamental aspect of Shanker's "total belief" was that *all people* have the right to live under a democratic system of government. Shanker argued repeatedly that democracy is the only political system in which the fundamental rights and equality of all people can be effectively protected and their interests represented. Conversely, "there is no freedom or democracy without trade unionism. The first thing the dictator does is get rid of the trade unions."⁸

In Shanker's view, the preponderance of right-wing and left-wing despotisms in the 20th century offered abundant proofs in favor of democracy. For him, any dictatorship was abhorrent. Yet, the idea of expanding democracy was not universally accepted. Indeed, many progressives abandoned the goal of promoting democracy as part of U.S. foreign policy aims. In the 1960s and 1970s, thinkers on the New Left, an ideological movement that emerged from the 1960s, embraced violent revolutions in Cuba and China as the new political model. Members of the political and business establishment generally favored détente and trade, which resulted in the acceptance of repression even in the case of totalitarian regimes. Many intellectuals trumpeted economic development over democracy in undeveloped countries, and it was often difficult to find a defense of democracy's benefits in public or academic settings.⁹

⁵ Interview with Ruth Wattenberg, former editor of the AFT's *American Educator* and former coordinator of the Education for Democracy Project, December 16, 2011.

⁶ Interview with Bill Moyers, PBS, shown in the video presentation, "Albert Shanker: A Memorial Tribute," American Federation of Teachers, 1997.

⁷ Interview for the video "AFT International Affairs," shown at the 1990 AFT Convention in Boston, MA.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See, for example, "The Problem of the New Left" by Tom Kahn (*Commentary*, July 1966); "Political Terrorism: Hysteria on the Left" by Irving Howe (*New York Times*, April, 2, 1970); *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* by Raymond L. Garthoff (Brookings Institution Press, 1985); and "Theories of Political Development" a curriculum by Daniel Brumberg of Georgetown University <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/brumberg/govt778.pdf>.

Shanker challenged these views. Democracy, in his estimation, offered the best possibility for achieving both economic development and freedom. He went further: he considered it a moral imperative for citizens of democratic countries both to safeguard their own civic and political institutions and to help those struggling for freedom and against tyranny, including in the Soviet bloc. If the government would not act on that imperative, he knew the union movement would.

Shanker's belief in public education was intertwined with his belief in democracy. All democratic societies support universal public education systems, with the aim of providing all children with a comprehensive education. By giving children a chance to learn and advance themselves, public education offers the best chance of creating a society in which equal opportunity is the rule and not the exception. Public education was thus an essential institution to be both safeguarded and improved. A weak public school system, Shanker argued, would result in greater economic stratification and political inequality.¹⁰

For his internationalist views, Shanker had an important framework: the AFL-CIO and George Meany, its president from 1955 to 1979. Meany adhered to and greatly expanded labor's strong tradition of worker internationalism. The American Federation of Labor (AFL)'s first leader, Samuel Gompers, had played a key role in forming the International Labor Organization in 1919 and in making worker rights standards an integral part of international law. His successor, William Green, backed efforts to save Jewish and other trade unionists from fascist and communist repression.¹¹ After World War II, as Green's secretary-treasurer and then as his successor, George Meany presided over the American labor movement's extensive international operation, which was fundamentally responsible for the reconstruction of Europe's free trade union movement and for providing sustained support to free trade unions in the developing world. After the 1955 merger of the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations to form the AFL-CIO, Meany, as president of the merged organization, expanded labor's international reach with the creation of three regional institutes aimed at fostering free trade unions around the world: the African American Labor Center, American Institute for Free Labor Development, and Asian American Free Labor Institute. For Meany and his predecessors, worker rights were as indispensable to democracy as free markets were to capitalism in the eyes of businessmen.¹² As Shanker became more involved in the AFL-CIO's international work, he gained greater respect for its role in supporting worker rights and free trade unionism around the world.

As president of the AFT, Shanker played an unusually active role in the union's international trade secretariat, the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU).¹³ As a member of IFFTU's executive board and then as president from 1981 to 1993, Shanker worked closely with IFFTU's leaders and affiliates to increase the federation's membership (from 5 million to 8 million), to strengthen its democratic identity, and to strengthen its support of free teacher unions in their struggles against repression. In the early 1990s, Shanker led the IFFTU in merger negotiations with a larger rival organization, the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Professions (WCOTP), resulting in the creation of Education International (EI)

¹⁰ See Appendix I, Albert Shanker's "Where We Stand" columns on international issues.

¹¹ See, e.g., JLC collection and exhibit at the Tamiment Library, Robert Wagner Archives, Bobst Library ("Anti-Nazi Activities" in Introduction to the Collection).

¹² See Chapters 5 ("Cold War") and 19 ("Human Rights"), Robinson, Archie, "George Meany and His Times," (Simon and Schuster, New York: 1981).

¹³ IFFTU was one of 12 autonomous international trade secretariats (ITSes) associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) that were organized around similar trades or services (metalworkers, construction trades, etc.). In 2006, the ICFTU merged with the Christian Democratic World Confederation of Labor to form the International Trade Union Confederation. ITSes now call themselves Global Union Federations (GUFs).

in 1993.¹⁴ The 30-million-member EI today is the largest global union federation (GUF) in the international free trade union movement.

But Albert Shanker's influence on the global scene was broader than his organizational achievements. His leadership of successful strikes in New York City and his imprisonment twice for violating laws forbidding public sector walkouts were international news. European trade unionists and socialists respected an American "willing to go to jail for his trade union principles."¹⁵ Over time, his stature gave his voice greater worldwide resonance than virtually any other contemporary labor leader except George Meany. His "Where We Stand" column, which appeared weekly in the *New York Times* for 27 years and covered union, education, and international issues, had mainly a domestic audience and focus, but it also enjoyed a large international readership. It was read in numerous countries by union leaders, businessmen, opinion and policy makers, education ministers, and even prime ministers.¹⁶

Within the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the AFT, the local and national unions Shanker led, he demanded that the leadership and staff attend meetings and conferences of the AFL-CIO on international affairs. Upon being elected AFT president, Shanker invited a wide range of international speakers to the union's executive council meetings and AFT conventions—from Kurdish and South African resistance leaders to Soviet and Yugoslav dissidents; he implemented exchanges for AFT leaders with teacher unions abroad; and carried out assistance and training programs for unionists in other countries. In 1981, he created a separate international affairs department within the union, which became the largest international department among AFL-CIO affiliates. The department's broad mix of programs—union development training, democracy promotion, civic education, AIDS awareness training, among others—has engaged AFT members at all levels in the international work of the union. It was involved in key democracy struggles where Shanker believed the labor movement had to play a part. Today, it continues to organize a wide range of leadership exchanges, training programs, and solidarity campaigns.

Shanker also believed that the union movement had to be involved in U.S. foreign policy debates since union members had such a key stake in their outcome. He frequently used his "Where We Stand" column and the union's publications to educate members and others on human rights issues, to give support to dissidents and democratic forces struggling against dictatorship, and to advocate on foreign and defense policy issues. On foreign policy, he developed a reputation as a hard-liner, or hawk, similar to that of the AFL-CIO. His views were part of what Rick Kahlenberg calls Shanker's "tough liberalism." Former AFT vice president Herb Magidson describes Shanker's views as "muscular liberal internationalism," meaning the advocacy of a strong defense against freedom's enemies and the use of American power to foster freedom and democratic change.¹⁷ Shanker advocated these views in both political parties, but mostly the Democratic Party, which shared his pro-labor and liberal principles and where he had more influence. He also made sure labor's voice was heard in important opinion and policymaking circles, like the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations,

¹⁴ Historically, the WCOTP, like its largest member, the National Education Association (NEA), had less of a trade union orientation than IFFTU and the AFT and it still included organizations dominated by administrators. WCOTP also maintained cordial relations with the communist-dominated teachers' international federation, called FISE. In the merger negotiations, the two agreed to associate with the ICFTU and to have a strict requirements for democratic organization to qualify for membership (see chapter 9 for a full discussion on IFFTU and EI).

¹⁵ Interview with the former president of the German Teachers Union and former member of the executive board of IFFTU and EI (1981-97), Dieter Wunder, September 25, 2011.

¹⁶ Interviews with David Dorn, June 6, 2011, Eugenia Kemble, June 6, 2011, et. al.

¹⁷ Herb Magidson, "Defending Democracy: Albert Shanker Still Leads the Way," *American Educator* (Summer 2008), 25-30.

and leading newspaper editorial boards. He joined human rights organizations that had strong ties to labor, such as Freedom House and the International Rescue Committee.

As strongly held as his views were, Shanker had another defining attribute, namely the ability to listen to others' arguments and rethink his own ideas. At 6'4", he was a physically imposing person; intellectually, he could be downright intimidating. Shanker, however, welcomed debate and discussion on even terms with almost anyone, anywhere, including the formal meetings of the AFT executive council and after-hours encounters at his office. In formal meetings, he called on those with opposing positions first, and usually gave every opponent a chance to have his or her say. This style was in part due to his democratic orientation. But in part it reflected his belief that some positions required greater unity among the leadership, and it was sometimes better to craft a consensus view than to secure a simple majority victory. Shanker was also abundantly confident in his ability to debate and persuade. After listening to significant disagreement, he could, through the force of logic, often convince people to change their positions. In turn, his staff and leadership counted on Shanker to be open to listening to argument and to letting himself be persuaded to change his own views.

Shanker did insist on informed debate. Misstatements or slanders were quickly corrected; poorly developed arguments were quickly rebuffed. Shanker was ever the teacher, providing suggestions and recommendations for articles or research, and offering extra copies of books for people to read. There were a stable of foreign authors—Victor Serge, Ignazio Silone, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, among others—whose works he would buy cheaply in multiple copies at old bookstores. He regularly sent articles on a wide range of international and domestic topics to AFT executive council and staff members, based on his own voluminous reading.¹⁸

. . .

The world is significantly different today than when Albert Shanker first became active in the American Federation of Teachers and, through it, in international affairs. World War II was a recent event and the Cold War dominated the world scene. In his last decade, Shanker witnessed the fall of communism and the end of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff. He also looked beyond that era's mindset towards the 21st Century challenges of building democracy in new countries and regions, while also witnessing the continued dangers of violent nationalism, anti-Semitism, and chauvinism.

Shanker rose to leadership at the height of labor's power and lived through its slow decline—even as the AFT grew significantly. He saw the labor movement become increasingly defensive and insular in the face of implacable and relentless employer hostility to unions and worker rights, punctuated by the mass outsourcing of jobs to countries that did little or nothing to protect worker rights. Shanker straddled these different eras. His activities in the international arena should be seen through these prisms.

Albert Shanker's achievements in international affairs, however, are not just an artifact of the Cold War or Labor Internationalist eras. As one looks further into the subject, his achievements are an example of democratic action and a model for current and future leaders in the labor and human rights movements to learn from and build upon. Shanker's vision for the world boiled down to an admirably simple idea:

At some point, hopefully, freedom will become general. It will then be accepted for what it is: not a feared and subversive doctrine but an essential condition for the flourishing of the human spirit.¹⁹

¹⁸ For Shanker's eclectic reading habits, see the list of 4,000 books in the Shanker family library prepared by Edith Shanker (available through the Albert Shanker Institute).

¹⁹ Speech to Freedom House Annual Dinner, December 1973, Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Archives, United Federation of Teachers Records, Series II, B: Presidential Files of Albert Shanker, Wag.022, Box 64, Folder 9 (hereinafter referred to as: Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker).

“At some point, hopefully, freedom will become general. It will then be accepted for what it is: not a feared and subversive doctrine but an essential condition for the flourishing of the human spirit. . . .”

Albert Shanker
Freedom House Dinner, 1973

2

SHANKER'S ROOTS

When Albert Shanker was elected president of the United Federation of Teachers in 1964, he had what long-time colleague Rachelle Horowitz describes as a “fully formed political outlook.”²⁰ It had been so for some time.

When he entered college, Shanker was already a member of the Socialist Party of Norman Thomas. The term “socialist,” of course, did not mean support for Bolshevism, treason, or the overthrow of the United States government (as Senator Joseph McCarthy alleged). It meant believing in trade unions as an indisputable vehicle for improving workers’ lives, supporting government as a vital tool for helping workers and the poor, taking part in the struggle for civil rights and opposing communism ardently. While Shanker evolved in his views (and let his party membership lapse), he continued to identify with these beliefs throughout his life. Most of Shanker’s intellectual heroes from this period came from the anti-communist Left: Eugene Debs, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, Dwight MacDonald, George Orwell, Ignazio Silone, and others. They stayed with him his entire life; their books helped to fill his extensive library.²¹

As an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Shanker chaired the Socialist Study Club and organized its meetings on a variety of issues. But an anti-communist law adopted by the Illinois legislature obliged Shanker to make “elaborate justification” for any meeting to university officials. Two invitations were indicative. One to Dwight MacDonald, the editor of *Partisan Review*, was nixed because of MacDonald’s radicalism. A second was approved for Jerzy Glicksman, whose testimony, *Tell the West: An Eyewitness Account* (see inset), was one of the first descriptions of Soviet labor camps by a survivor.²²

In 1947, Shanker became a charter member of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), a new, activist-oriented group aimed at achieving equality for African-Americans, and in 1948 he participated in a campaign to desegregate the movie theaters and restaurants in Urbana-Champaign, one of many northern strongholds of segregationist Jim Crow laws.²³

Shanker’s worldview, however, was molded first and foremost by his upbringing. He grew up during the Depression and lived in a small apartment (by age 11, he “literally could not fit in his room when lying down”).²⁴ His parents were first-generation Jewish Americans from Russia. Shanker’s first language and the language of the home was Yiddish, a combination of Hebrew and German spoken by Eastern European Jews. Both parents worked long, hard hours. His father was a newspaper deliveryman; his mother a textile worker. His

²⁰ Interview with Rachelle Horowitz, September 23, 2011. Horowitz was AFT political director from 1974 to 1995.

²¹ Interviews with George Altomare, December 2, 2011; Edith Shanker, March 16, 2012.

²² Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 28. *Tell the West: An Eyewitness Account* was published in abbreviated form by the National Committee for Free Europe and in full by Gresham Press. After arriving in the United States, Glicksman became the Chicago office director of the Jewish Labor Committee, established in 1933 to save trade unionists from Nazi persecution.

²³ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 27-29. See also *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942—68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²⁴ Interview with Edith Shanker, March 16, 2012.

mother's membership in unions was the crucial element that improved the family's condition; first, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) and then, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). "Unions were second to God in our home," Shanker said (third was FDR). His mother taught him by debating on many topics. She avidly read the *Jewish Daily Forward* and discussed the events of the day, especially the situation of Jews in Europe, with her son.²⁵

Shanker and his family lived in an Irish-Catholic neighborhood with few other Jews. Sixty years later, he vividly remembered "the anti-Semitic ravings of Father Coughlin blaring from apartment windows on Sunday mornings."²⁶ He spent most of his free hours alone, reading, pursuing hobbies, or exploring New York City. Shanker cited the public schools as elemental to his success, but he also relied on other institutions: the public library, New York's museums, and the Boy Scouts. As he grew older, Shanker explored the vital world of socialist intellectual life, but never had a dominant mentor. He explored ideas mostly on his own.²⁷

Thus, the basic elements of his outlook—Jewish identity, an appreciation of unions and public schools and public institutions, an abhorrence of discrimination and dictatorship, a commitment to civil rights and equality, an adherence to democracy, and an intellectual curiosity—were already well nourished by the time Shanker headed off for university and adult life. He would explore many different views and theories over his lifetime, from business organization to neo-conservatism, from socialism to organizational theory. (His unfinished PhD thesis was on philosopher Elijah Jordan's theories about corporate and organizational behavior.) But, from an early age, his worldview was rooted in this solid and unchanging foundation. These beliefs led him to education, to the union movement, to the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO, and to a world of international trade union and human rights activism.

²⁵ Schierenbeck, "Class Struggles: The UFT Story: Al Shanker's Rise to Power, Part 8," January 13, 1997, 2. See UFT website at www.uft.org.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, and Schierenbeck, "Class Struggles: The UFT Story."

3

A First Step in International Waters

Albert Shanker's first formal trip abroad as president of the United Federation of Teachers was at age 38 to the Dominican Republic in May 1966. It was two years after his election and a significant step into international waters.

The Dominican Republic had become a prominent international hotspot. President Lyndon Johnson had that year ordered U.S. military intervention to pacify a rebellion against loyalists of the former dictator, Rafael Trujillo, who, after 30 years of brutal rule, had been assassinated five years earlier by disgruntled army officers. In 1962, the left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) and its leader, Juan Bosch, surprised many observers by winning the country's first free legislative and presidential elections. Bosch and the PRD were social democratic in ideology and professed anti-communists, but he alarmed many in the military—fearful of the spread of the Cuban Revolution—by inviting exiled communists to return to the country and re-legalizing the Communist Party. Following the adoption of land-reform legislation, Bosch was overthrown in a Loyalist coup just eight months after taking office. The country was divided between the Trujillo Loyalists and the Constitutionals, who tried to restore Bosch. The Constitutionals led a rebellion in 1965, heightening U.S. fears of a communist takeover (reports of Cuba-backed “communist battalions” proved to be wrong). When the Constitutionals again assumed control, Johnson ordered U.S. troops to occupy the country and to ensure that constitutionally-mandated elections be held in June 1966.

Liberals and socialists opposed the U.S. intervention and feared what liberal commentator James Wechsler described as “yet another reversal for democratic progressivism in Latin America.”²⁸ Many were further alarmed after receiving reports of widespread violence and intimidation against Bosch supporters, organized by Loyalists. In response, Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas, civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, and historian Arthur Schlesinger, among other liberals and socialists launched the Commission for Free Elections in the Dominican Republic. Staffed by Penn Kemble, a young Socialist Party activist, the Commission operated out of the offices of the Workers' Defense League, one of several democratic socialist organizations Shanker was associated with. He was asked to join the Commission and travel to the Dominican Republic for the election period.

The elections were a clear challenge for liberal supporters of democracy. Elections offered an opportunity to restore the previously elected Bosch government to power under U.S. auspices—or to return the Democratic Revolutionary Party to parliament as a significant opposition voice. On the other hand, the candidate of the Loyalists (a protégé of Trujillo before his death), Joaquín Balaguer, had the support of the U.S. government as well as his country's powerful military and business elites. The election, as Wechsler put it, was “a fixed fight on different terms.” The campaign of violence backed by military forces had convinced many voters that a vote for Bosch meant a vote for instability and another coup d'état.

Still, Bosch and the PRD were taking part. It meant that the effort to help and support free elections had to be made. The Commission for Free Elections in the Dominican Republic acted quickly to send an advance team of Rustin, Reuther, Rep. Allard Lowenstein (D-N.Y.), and three others. When it arrived, the team confirmed reports of a campaign of intimidation across the country that had left 200 DPR members dead. The

²⁸ James Wechsler, “The Bosch Drama,” *New York Post*, June 6, 1966.

organized violence had forced Bosch to campaign from inside his heavily guarded home through radio messages. Surprisingly, the advance team was able to report that, following their arrival, there was “an improved situation,” indicating that there was some sensitivity by Loyalists to outside monitoring. Knowing that Bosch would feel obliged to campaign in public if Norman Thomas joined him, Rustin convinced the socialist elder statesman, who had said he was too old to travel, to go to the Dominican Republic to join Bosch for public rallies.²⁹

The full 70-person monitoring team sent by the Commission arrived a few days before the June 1 election (twice as large as the observer team sent by the Organization of American States). It included Shanker, who stayed in the capital, Santo Domingo. But Commission observers were sent throughout the island to monitor the conduct of the elections. The U.S. Embassy was not welcoming and “had leaked stories hostile to [the delegation’s] role; they were widely depicted as ‘Bosch’ agents.”³⁰ While it is true delegation members were mostly sympathetic to Bosch, they were also “committed to observing the elections objectively,” which they did.³¹ In the end, Balaguer won by a wide margin and the Commission’s report concluded that the election balloting was largely fair and that there was no “palpable evidence” of significant fraud.³² This caused a stir among left-wing critics of the Johnson administration, who argued that the pre-election campaign of intimidation had created an atmosphere of fear, precluding any possibility for free elections.³³ The Commission’s mandate was limited, however, to the monitoring of the elections themselves. As Kemble wrote in a post-election report, “[I]t was obvious that for the most part the elections were free and honest.” Not admitting this, he argued, would have discredited the members of the Commission and prevented them “from aiding the Dominican people in the future.”³⁴

This was not one of the finest hours for U.S. foreign policy, to say the least. The U.S. government had backed brutal, reactionary forces out of an unjustified (if not totally unfounded) fear of another communist revolution in the Caribbean. The election’s immediate aftermath was also not promising: the military carried out many reprisals against PRD members. Bosch went into exile and later renounced democracy; he participated in no further elections (although the PRD did). At the same time, the 1966 contest, mandated by a new constitution, broke the country’s pattern of dictatorships and coups and set the stage for regular and mostly honest elections. Ultimately, twenty years later, this led to a peaceful transfer of power. Just as importantly, the Commission for Free and Fair Elections in the Dominican Republic had set a precedent for U.S. citizen action in foreign affairs, even in the face of a resistant U.S. State Department. It was a precedent that helped launch the democracy promotion movement.

Shanker’s role in the Commission reflected his basic values and public alliances, and set the stage for later democracy campaigns in places such as the Soviet Union, Chile, and South Africa. It also strengthened his partnership with Bayard Rustin. Shanker had begun his civil rights activism in the Illinois chapter of CORE; Rustin had helped launch CORE at the national level. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, while working in the union, Shanker supported Rustin on many civil rights initiatives and protests in New York City and elsewhere. He also heavily backed the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, to which the UFT contributed

²⁹ Rachele Horowitz, e-mail correspondence with author, September 24, 2012. Horowitz had been the Workers’ Defense League’s executive director.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Penn Kemble, “Why Bosch Lost the Dominican Elections,” *Dissent*, June 1966.

³² “Memoranda and Report of the Committee for Free Elections in the Dominican Republic,” Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 58, Folder 17.

³³ Norman Gall, “The Strange Dominican Elections,” *The New Leader*, June 20, 1966.

³⁴ Kemble, “Why Bosch Lost.”

significant funds and sent numerous buses of union participants. The UFT became a major backer of the A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI), formed in 1965 by the civil rights legend, A. Philip Randolph, and directed by Bayard Rustin. APRI fostered an alliance between the trade union and civil rights movements and had the mission of increasing African-American participation in trade unions at all levels. The Dominican Republic campaign was Rustin's and Shanker's first collaboration in the foreign policy arena. It would not be their last, domestically or internationally.

“The basic struggle is for human rights and the major issue is whether the Polish workers will be permitted to have free trade unions. . . . Millions of Americans who have generally been hostile to trade unions can clearly see in this struggle in Poland what they have not always been able to see in their own backyard: that a union gives workers dignity and that a union is not just a vehicle allowing a worker to win one benefit or another but, rather, a permanent instrument enabling him to fight for his rights without fear of punishment or reprisal.”

Albert Shanker, 1980

4

The Making of a Teacher Unionist: The UFT Years

Shanker's active involvement in the Commission for Free and Fair Elections in the Dominican Republic was, at that point in his career, a digression from his primary focus: organizing and strengthening U.S. teacher unions.

Indeed, his whole being had been committed to the struggle for teacher unionism in the United States. He joined the cause in 1953, at age 25, after being hired as a mathematics teacher at Astoria Junior High School in Queens, New York—only his second teaching position. Within weeks of beginning the school year, he and two colleagues, George Altomare and Dan Sanders, decided to join a union in response to the unsupportive, overbearing, and demeaning behavior of the school administration, especially its assistant principal. There were more than a hundred teacher organizations in the city, but only two, the Teachers Union and the New York Teachers Guild, were serious candidates. The decision to join the Guild was an easy one, according to Altomare, and “it had everything to do with international affairs.”³⁵ The Teachers Union (TU) had formed in 1916 as an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. While having a reputation for being more effective in lobbying, the TU had come under Communist Party control. “We all heard the stories of the Hitler-Stalin Pact,” Altomare explained.³⁶ The New York Teachers' Guild, on the other hand, had been formed in 1935 by original leaders of the TU who had left it when the communists gained control. The Guild supported the democratic socialist and anti-totalitarian principles of the AFT and, after the TU was expelled for communist influence, was chartered as AFT Local 2 in 1941.³⁷

In no time, the three Astoria teachers had organized the Guild's largest chapter and began to branch out.³⁸ Shanker became editor of the Guild newspaper and, in 1959, left teaching to join the AFT staff as northeast regional representative (assigned to the Guild office in New York City with just 2,000 paid members). There, he joined Dave Selden, another AFT national organizer who originally had been an auto worker, then a teacher, then president of the AFT local in Dearborn, Michigan. After serving in World War II, Selden joined the AFT staff and spent seven years assigned to assist the Guild add to its couple of thousand members. The two organizers, together with many skilled activists, achieved unexpected results. First, they brought dozens of teacher groups together into a unified organization, the United Federation of Teachers. Then they convinced the

³⁵ Interview with George Altomare, December 10, 2011. Altomare had an additional bond with Shanker: his mother worked in the same textile factory as Shanker's mother.

³⁶ The Treaty of Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, also known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, was signed on August 23, 1939. Secret protocols carved up Eastern Europe between the two powers, Germany occupying and partially absorbing most of Poland and the Soviet Union annexing eastern Poland, the Baltic States, and other territories. Stalin, through the Comintern, ordered communist parties and front organizations to adopt an active pro-peace policy towards Germany so as to forestall U.S. involvement in the war. The Teacher's Union adopted the Communist Party line.

³⁷ William Edward Eaton, *The American Federation of Teachers, 1916-1961: A History of the Movement* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975).

³⁸ Ibid.

unified leadership to call a strike in the fall of 1960 to demand full collective bargaining rights for teachers. Although only 10 percent of New York City's teachers—5,000— went out on strike, several thousand others called in sick. The union benefited from a pro-labor mayor, Robert Wagner, who agreed to hold a referendum to see if teachers did, in fact, want collective bargaining. The teachers and school-related personnel overwhelmingly supported collective bargaining and, in December 1961, the UFT won a union representation election against its two rivals, the Teachers Union and the Teachers Bargaining Organization (affiliated with the National Education Association). Both groups had actively campaigned against collective bargaining and directed their members to cross the picket line. The UFT achieved its first collective bargaining agreement in June 1962 after a tense standoff with the city administration. In one year, teachers' paltry wages increased by fully one-third (or around \$995).³⁹

Shanker, a key player in all of these successes, was elected UFT secretary in 1962. In 1964, he was elected president to replace the veteran Guild and UFT leader Charles Cogen, who had nurtured and supported the young teacher activists. Cogen left to become national AFT president (Selden went with him as his assistant). Shanker led several more significant union actions, including a bruising series of strikes in 1967 and 1968. In 1967, a 14-day strike was called over school improvement and professional policy issues, including an intervention and support plan for high-poverty schools, smaller class sizes, and the ability of teachers to remove disruptive students from classes. In 1968, the union carried out three racially polarizing strikes, lasting a total of 36 days, to protect the due process rights of teachers who had been fired solely due to their race by a new black-led, decentralized local school board in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. These strikes had a significant cost. In both cases, Shanker was imprisoned for 15 days for violating New York State law barring public employees from striking. Judges imposed a heavy fine on the union and rescinded automatic dues collection (forcing member-by-member collection). Worse for Shanker— although he enjoyed the continued support of major civil rights leaders, including Randolph and Rustin—his relationship with a significant segment of the African-American community was severely damaged, something he worked for years to repair.⁴⁰

These events gained Shanker an international reputation and a degree of notoriety. Some considered him a dangerous militant, immortalized in Woody Allen's movie "Sleeper" as the man who had caused a fictional apocalypse by getting hold of a nuclear bomb. But within the domestic and international labor movement, his was a profile in courage. His members saw him as a consummate leader, the man who won and protected the union rights and human dignity of teachers, and who fought to improve the schools in which they worked.

Despite his growing celebrity, Shanker devoted most of his time to building the UFT. He hired a top-notch staff, negotiated a model welfare benefits program, reinforced the union's organizational networks, set up professional development programs, crafted a school improvement program, established a first-rate political action operation, and recruited new members—a lot of them. Among his proudest achievements was the organization of classroom assistants, known as paraprofessionals or "paras", made up largely by minorities, to which he dedicated significant union resources. He negotiated a large boost in these workers' meager salaries and benefits, as well as an innovative career ladder program—paid for by the city—that gave paraprofessionals the opportunity to earn teacher certification at Columbia University's Teachers College. This initiative also gave a significant boost to the diversification of New York City's teaching corps.⁴¹

By 1970, the UFT had around 75,000 members, an increase of 73,000 in ten years, and represented 97 percent of teachers in New York City. It was one of the largest, most effective, and most powerful local unions in the U.S.—indeed the world. Shanker's leadership in New York City inspired teacher unionists throughout the

³⁹ Ibid. and Interview with George Altomare, December 10, 2011. See also *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives* by Debra E. Bernhardt and Rachel Bernstein (New York University Press, New York: 2000), 154-55.

⁴⁰ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, chapters 5 and 6 on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike.

⁴¹ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 2-3, 129-132.

country to seek representational elections and collective bargaining agreements. He traveled widely to wherever there was a strike or bargaining conflict, gaining the appreciation of local leaders from New Orleans to San Francisco.⁴²

In 1971, Shanker negotiated the first merger agreement between AFT and NEA state organizations. The new organization, called NYSUT (New York State United Teachers), elected Shanker as co-president. The national NEA still did not consider itself a union. But the AFT's success had pressured some state organizations to change. Shanker hoped the New York merger would start a waterfall, leading to overall merger. In this hope, he was disappointed—there were mergers in only a few other states and localities. Still, the NYSUT merger more than doubled the AFT's New York State membership (to nearly 200,000). Overall, the AFT now claimed almost 400,000 members.⁴³

⁴² "UFT: 50 Years: 1960-2010," www.uft.org, "The 1970s," 19-34.

⁴³ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 142-44 and "AFT Membership by States and Locals for Membership Years 1973 and 1974," Organizing Office, NEA, 1975.

“The AFT is proud of its record in supporting dissidents from various countries throughout the world in their right to speak out against totalitarianism and for freedom of conscience and expression.”

Albert Shanker

5

THE MAKING OF A UNION INTERNATIONALIST: THE UFT YEARS

Before 1974, Shanker did not engage himself much in the international affairs work of the national union, which was properly the responsibility of the AFT's president.

New York City, however, offered many opportunities for him to continue his apprenticeship in labor internationalism. For one, many representatives of teacher unions from other countries visited the city and asked to meet with the now-famous teacher leader. Despite a crushing schedule, he always made room for these meetings with foreign guests, and even gave out his direct telephone line to foreign visitors who wished to schedule meetings.⁴⁴ Visitors from Japan and Germany were his most frequent guests and in later years he would travel to both countries often. He came to gain a great affinity for their cultures and labor movements.

The Committee of Conscience

There were also many internationally oriented organizations centered in New York seeking support from the UFT. After his mission to the Dominican Republic, Shanker became involved in several campaigns and organizations. One was the Committee of Conscience, a coalition of trade unionists and liberals opposed to South African apartheid. The Committee was headed by A. Philip Randolph, the legendary civil rights and trade union leader. Usually referred to as "chief," he had led many successful campaigns to advance black freedom.⁴⁵ A principled internationalist, he helped start American movement against South African apartheid in the early 1950s.⁴⁶

In 1966, in the wake of South African legislation strengthening apartheid, the Committee of Conscience organized a campaign of divestment in banks doing business with South Africa, particularly Chase Manhattan and First National Bank. In a letter signed by Randolph, the committee appealed to trade unions, including the UFT, to withdraw any deposits from these banks, which the committee singled out for their direct collaboration with the apartheid regime. Within two weeks, Shanker got approval from the UFT executive board to withdraw all of the union's funds from Chase. He and Treasurer Jules Kolodny sent a terse letter to Chase's president, David Rockefeller, terminating the UFT's account and asking for a bank check for the balance. Shanker also

⁴⁴ Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records President: Shanker, Wagner 0.22, Box 44, Folders 23-30.

⁴⁵ Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Randolph led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in a 13-year odyssey for recognition by the Pullman Company, which used violence and intimidation to prevent unionization. The Brotherhood's success in 1937 was the largest union victory for black workers in U.S. history. Randolph drew on the organizational strength of the Brotherhood to lead the March on Washington movement, which succeeded in obtaining presidential executive orders in 1940 and 1947 forcing the integration of the defense industry and the armed services. Most notably, he led the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963.

⁴⁶ Randolph was one of the founders of the Americans for South African Resistance in 1952, which gathered support around the first major black protest of apartheid within South Africa, the Defiance Campaign. See <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=American+Committee+on+Africa>.

sent Rockefeller a longer letter, in which he attempted to convince him to end Chase's relationship with South Africa. Rockefeller refused. In his reply, he argued that withdrawing business from a country formally recognized by the United States was "an unwarranted infringement on our country's foreign policy."⁴⁷

Jewish Identity, Jewish Discrimination, and Israel

Around this time, Shanker became active in three Jewish- and Israel-related organizations that fit his general socialist and labor orientation. Through them, Shanker made a strong public assertion of his Jewish identity, his support for the state of Israel, and his sensitivity to anti-Semitic discrimination by dictatorships.

The first organization was the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC). It was founded in 1934 by Yiddish-speaking immigrant trade unionists in organizations, such as the Workmen's Circle, the Jewish Labor Bund, and the United Hebrew Trades, as well as by Jewish union leaders including David Dubinsky and Sidney Hillman, leaders of the ILGWU and ACWA. Its main concern was the rise of European fascism and the danger it represented for Jews. The JLC's first action was to organize a boycott against Nazi Germany, helping to mobilize American labor behind the fight against fascism. At the JLC's urging, the AFL launched the "Labor Chest" to aid trade unionists and social democrats in Europe facing fascist persecution. After the war, the JLC became the "Jewish voice" in labor and "labor's voice in the Jewish community."⁴⁸

Shanker was certainly familiar with the JLC. Its leaders were the leaders of his mother's unions. And, as an undergraduate at the University of Illinois, he had invited the JLC's Chicago-area director, Jerzy Glicksman, to speak about his experiences in Soviet labor camps. So Shanker's more direct involvement was thus overdue. He joined the board of directors and later served as secretary, treasurer, and president. He encouraged fellow Jewish trade unionists to join the organization. He participated in conventions, recommended contributions from the UFT and AFT, and crafted his own signed fundraising letters on the JLC's behalf. He actively participated in the JLC's actions in support of trade unions, Israel, and the protection of Soviet Jews.⁴⁹

The second organization that drew Shanker's backing was the American Trade Union Council for Histadrut (ATUCH), which rallied support among U.S. trade unionists for Israel and its labor movement, the Histadrut. Shanker actively supported the ATUCH's exchanges which brought Jews and Gentiles together for trips to Israel. (Shanker later organized similar trips for AFT leaders.) Following the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel was faced with a financial crisis and Histadrut faced bankruptcy. The ATUCH organized a \$1 million fundraising campaign and Shanker supported it with contributions from the UFT, solicitations to other unions and to individual UFT members, and a request for an AFT contribution. He joined the ATUCH board of trustees in 1968 and had a strong relationship with its long-standing director, Gregory Bardacke.⁵⁰

In 1967, Shanker joined Bayard Rustin in a third organization, the Ad Hoc Commission for the Rights of Soviet Jews. This was an organizational continuation of the Conference on the Rights of Soviet Jews, a major event organized in 1963 that brought together leading writers and civil rights figures, including Saul Bellow, Martin Luther King, Jr., Arthur Miller, and Robert Penn Warren, to protest the Soviet Union's treatment of its

⁴⁷ Letter of the Committee of Conscience and related documents, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President's Office Wag. 0.22, Box 44, Folders 23-30.

⁴⁸ See http://www.jewishlabor.org/JLC_Basic_History.pdf.

⁴⁹ Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 22, Box 69, Folders 12-13. In recognition of his work for the organization and its values, he was awarded the JLC's Human and Trade Union Rights Award in 1975.

⁵⁰ Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker Wag. 22, Box 67, Folder 3 and interview with Judy Bardacke, June 14, 2011.

Jewish citizens. Rustin, who considered the treatment of Soviet Jews akin to the treatment of blacks in America, was appointed head of the Ad Hoc Commission. He brought his usual energy to the cause, organizing public actions, letter campaigns, and protests that dramatized the systematic discrimination against Jews in the Soviet Union.⁵¹ Shanker was a participant in these and other Soviet Jewry actions. In subsequent years, Shanker strongly backed Rustin's work in developing the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, passed by Congress in 1974 and signed by President Gerald Ford in 1975. The Amendment tied the granting of Most Favored Nation trade status for the USSR to its Jewish emigration policy. (Jackson-Vanik applied to emigration and other human rights policies in "non-market economy" nations, generally, including China. It was repealed in December, 2012.) Shanker also later championed the cause of a number of Soviet refuseniks, Jews who were refused exit visas, in his "Where We Stand" column.

Shanker's affinity with Israel was strengthened by his first trip there in July 1971, hosted by the Israel Teachers Union (ITU) and its general secretary, Shalom Levin. It was his third official trip abroad (after the Dominican Republic, he attended a 1968 International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions [IFFTU] meeting in Spain). It was also his first union-to-union exchange. Shalom Levin, the ITU's general secretary since 1955, is the only other person whom colleagues in IFFTU likened to Albert Shanker.⁵² His charisma was grounded in similar convictions to that of Shanker: a deep identification with Labor Israel (the broad range of worker-related institutions tied to the Histadrut), a commitment to equality, and dedication to the international campaign against racism and anti-Semitism. The high point of the trip for Shanker were meetings with Yigal Alon, former acting prime minister and minister of education in the Golda Meir government, and David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first leader.

The AFL-CIO and Labor Internationalism

The Israel trip marked the beginning of Shanker's increased travel abroad and his greater identification as America's top teacher union leader within both IFFTU and the AFL-CIO. He became the AFT's most important representative for international trade union activities. This was inevitable. Not only was Shanker's national and international profile more prominent, but also neither of the AFT's two presidents in this period, Charles Cogen (1964-68) and David Selden (1968-74), was inclined to fulfill the international work of the union.

Selden's inattention was partly political. After his 1968 election as AFT president, Selden publicly criticized the AFL-CIO and George Meany on foreign policy issues, especially Vietnam, giving rise to increasing rancor on both sides. As a consequence, the AFL-CIO began to request that Shanker represent the labor umbrella abroad, rather than the AFT president. For Shanker, Selden's animosity toward the AFL-CIO was dismaying. Selden was a friend and mentor. Shanker had been a key supporter in Selden's run for the AFT presidency; still, Shanker disapproved of Selden's anti-AFL-CIO views.⁵³

Shanker's rising star as well as the clarity of his support for the AFL-CIO was noticed by AFL-CIO President George Meany, along with Jay Lovestone, head of the AFL-CIO's international affairs operation. But

⁵¹ "Dear Friend," Letter from Bayard Rustin to Albert Shanker, re: Ad Hoc Committee on Soviet Jewry, March 20, 1967, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 84, Folders 3-13. See also "Bayard Rustin" in Wikipedia Encyclopedia.

⁵² Interviews with Fred Van Leeuwen, general secretary of Education International, September 26-28, 2011 and Dieter Wunder, former president of the German Teachers Union (GEW), September 25, 2011.

⁵³ "Why I Am Running for AFT President," National Team for Al Shanker for AFT President, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 26, Folder 31; Interview with Edith Shanker, March 16, 2012.

it was Lovestone's longtime comrade-in-arms, Irving Brown, based in New York as director of the AFL-CIO's African American Labor Center (AALC), who formed a personal relationship with Shanker. It was Brown who schooled Shanker on the intricacies of the international trade union movement.

Brown was already a legend. As the AFL's European representative in post-World War II Europe, he was responsible for helping to rebuild the devastated free trade union movements on the continent, especially in Germany, Italy, and France. He helped thwart the efforts of the Soviet Union to undermine the Marshall Plan, also known as the Economic Recovery Program (ERP).⁵⁴ At Stalin's order, communist-controlled unions tried to prevent the unloading of relief aid and to disrupt transportation at a time of widespread devastation, hunger, and unemployment. Working with Europe's democratic unions, Brown faced down violence and intimidation to ensure the delivery of ERP aid through the docks of Marseilles (late in life, Brown was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his many contributions to the fight for freedom). He went on to help form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and to support indigenous labor movements and the struggle for decolonization in Africa.⁵⁵

Shanker and Brown grew close easily. They shared common beliefs in politics, free trade unionism, and anti-communism. Both read a lot, shared their reading, and had a common love of good food, wine, and travel. Shanker's admiration for Brown only grew as he heard stories of his derring-do from other actors in post-war events⁵⁶

Brown began to involve Shanker more in the foreign policy activities of the U.S. and international labor movements. The latter included the ICFTU and its regional organizations for Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and the International Labor Organization (ILO). All were deemed essential to defending worker rights, developing trade union policy, and promoting the AFL-CIO's interests internationally. Shanker would later participate in all of them. When Brown returned to Paris as the AFL-CIO's European representative in 1973, he made sure that the AFT was represented in regional, sectoral, and European trade union structures and encouraged Shanker to build relationships with European counterparts, especially the Federation of National Education (FEN).

IFFTU's Increasing Reach

Meanwhile, the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU) was increasing its activity and reach. Originally formed in 1926, it was reestablished in 1951, in the aftermath of World War II. It resembled the AFT: small and committed to principle but not yet consequential. Carl Megel, the AFT's president from 1952 to 1964 and the union's first paid officer had a strong interest in the IFFTU and established relationships with many of its affiliates. Even when he stepped down as AFT president to become the union's legislative director, Megel continued to attend IFFTU congresses, joined by Cleveland Federation of Teachers president James O'Meara, the AFT's representative on the IFFTU executive board. Convinced that IFFTU, like the AFT, would not achieve anything without staff, Megel had for ten years submitted a resolution for IFFTU to have a full-time paid general secretary. In 1966, the resolution passed and the IFFTU executive committee

⁵⁴ The Marshall Plan was offered to all European countries but was refused on Stalin's orders by Soviet-controlled Eastern European governments, a major factor increasing tensions with the West; Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State. See <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/truman>.

⁵⁵ Obituary, "Irving Brown, 77, U.S. Specialist on International Labor Movement" by Glenn Fowler, *New York Times*, February 11, 1989.

⁵⁶ Interview with David Dorn, December 15, 2011.

appointed a Belgian teacher unionist, André Braconier, to the post. These votes would set in motion lasting consequences for the international teacher union movement.⁵⁷

With the appointment of a full-time IFFTU general secretary, the AFL-CIO's three regional institutes, AIFLD, AALC, and AAFLI, increased their support for AFT's international activities, as part of a policy to encourage AFL-CIO affiliates to participate actively in their trade secretariats. This new funding, which began around 1970, provided crucial support to the IFFTU's union-to-union and regional training and exchange programs. At the AFT, Denise Thiry was hired to liaise with the three institutes, administer the funds, and help IFFTU carry out its proposed programs. She often drew more interest from Albert Shanker in New York than from David Selden in Washington, D.C. and, accordingly, copied most reports, budgets, and proposals to Shanker at his UFT office. On occasion, she bypassed Selden to ask for Shanker's direct intervention on serious funding issues.⁵⁸

Early Travels to Africa

Following his Israel trip, Shanker traveled twice more in 1971, both times to Africa. At the invitation of the AALC, he went to Ethiopia and Kenya in August-September, where he met with trade union and teacher union leaders. He then journeyed on to Lusaka, Zambia, to represent the AFL-CIO at a conference of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In early December, he attended IFFTU's first Pan-African Teacher Union Conference in Accra, Ghana. IFFTU had just a few affiliates from Africa and often they were dual affiliates with the IFFTU's rival, the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP). The conference was IFFTU's largest effort to date to attract stronger African membership. The previous March, at Braconier's request, Shanker had intervened with Irving Brown to obtain AALC funding for the conference and for programs in Upper Volta and Togo. Braconier thanked Shanker for the funding but also for his participation: the AFT's fight for trade union rights for teachers in the U.S., he wrote, was important for teacher unionists in Africa.⁵⁹

Shanker returned to Africa in August 1973. In addition to attending a major conference of African trade union federations in the Ivory Coast, then meeting with AALC representatives in Ethiopia and Tanzania, this trip had an odd twist. Shanker attended the world congress of the WCOTP in Nairobi, Kenya as a NYSUT (New York State United Teachers)—and therefore NEA—delegate. The WCOTP was the NEA's global organization; IFFTU was the AFT's. They reflected each organization's primary focus (the NEA's on professional organization, the AFT's on unionism). NYSUT, as a merged state federation, had dual affiliation to the NEA and could nominate someone to be part of the NEA delegation. NYSUT co-president Thomas Hobart, representing the NEA side of the merged organization, agreed that Shanker, who wanted to find out more about the WCOTP, should go. In the end, attending the congress reinforced for Shanker the importance of IFFTU's mission to promote free and independent teacher unionism as part of an international free trade union movement.⁶⁰ The WCOTP's inclusion of non-democratic and administrator-dominated teacher organizations

⁵⁷ On September 29, 1969, Braconier wrote Megel, "If IFFTU has now grown to a great International Organization we certainly owe it to your personal steady efforts." (Letter to Carl Megel from Andre Braconier, September 29, 1969. Archives of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [hereafter referred to as FES]. SPIE: 1966-1999, Megel Folder.)

⁵⁸ Memo of Denise Thiry to Albert Shanker, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 0.22, Box 23, Folder 15-17.

⁵⁹ Letter of André Braconier to Albert Shanker, December 23, 1971. Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 0.22, Box 95, Folders 1-9; interview with E. Shanker, March 16, 2012.

⁶⁰ Interview with Thomas Y. Hobart, former president of NYSUT, March 2, 2012.

translated into a diminished voice for teachers internationally, and a compromised stance towards basic issues of freedom of association and freedom generally.

Educating UFT Leadership

Given his experiences, Shanker wanted to increase the exposure of the UFT leadership to the AFL-CIO's global work and policies. The radical Left was having success in discrediting the AFL-CIO, painting it as a reactionary organization due to its support for U.S. policy in Vietnam. While the attacks were mostly unfounded, Shanker understood that the rationale for AFL-CIO's policies needed a much higher profile, or the Left's narrative would become entrenched, even within the UFT and AFT. Such a development, he believed, would be harmful to the interests of both the AFL-CIO and the AFT. Accordingly, in March 1971, in cooperation with the AFL-CIO's New York City Central Labor Council, Shanker's staff organized a major conference for UFT and other trade union leaders called "Labor and Foreign Policy in the 1970s." The purpose of the program was to offer a broader understanding of the AFL-CIO's promotion of worker rights and free trade unions globally. AFL-CIO president George Meany made the final presentation.⁶¹

Shanker also became a regular lecturer for the International Labor Program (ILP) organized by Roy Godson, a Georgetown University professor. The son of a highly respected labor attaché and a family friend of Irving Brown, Godson grew up around the international trade union movement. At Georgetown, he saw the lack of education in labor foreign policy and, in response, organized the ILP in order to educate local and national trade unionists on the AFL-CIO's international programs. Shanker became a staple of the program, fitting the ILP courses in with his frequent trips to Washington. Shanker worked with Godson to develop the ILP's curriculum, which was used to prepare the conference in New York.⁶²

Shanker and Godson developed a fruitful long-term relationship. Godson later started the Labor Desk, an outgrowth of the U.S. Youth Council, to organize international trade union trips and exchanges, mainly to Europe. These trips provided unique and lasting educational experiences for a generation of U.S. trade unionists. As AFT president, Shanker sent many executive council members on Labor Desk missions to Europe. Godson also organized seminars on international affairs for the UFT and AFT and was part of several other initiatives described below (Chapters 6 and 8).⁶³

Public Policy

During this period, Shanker was also taking a more public stance on U.S. foreign policy and seeking to influence American politics. The nomination of George McGovern as the Democratic Party presidential nominee signaled a retreat from the party's historically tough foreign policy and pro-labor economics. The AFL-CIO was coming under greater criticism and even attack from liberals, who called themselves McGovernites. Many traditional Democrats felt disenfranchised.

After George McGovern's disheartening landslide loss to Richard Nixon in the presidential election, many Democrats began to consider how to reassemble the party's broad base of support. In one effort, anti-

⁶¹ Albert Shanker letter to Harry Van Arsdale, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.022, Box 23, Folders 15-17.

⁶² "Letter of Roy Godson to Albert Shanker," December 11, 1972, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 23, Files 15-17; interview with Roy Godson, November 2, 2011. Godson also wrote *American Labor and European Politics: The AFL as a Transnational Force* (Crane Russak & Co., June 1976), the definitive book on the AFL-CIO's post-war international programs.

⁶³ Interviews with David Dorn, May 22, 2012; Roy Godson, March 15, 2012.

communist liberals, hard-line foreign policy Democrats, social democrats, and trade unionists came together to form the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM). Penn Kemble directed the operation. Shanker signed the founding statement⁶⁴ and became a strong supporter, sponsoring fundraisers, signing letters, and giving speeches at CDM events, including a 1976 dinner honoring Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet dissident.⁶⁵

Shanker and AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Lane Kirkland were particularly concerned about the Democratic Party's anti-defense posture following the Vietnam War. Throughout their careers, Shanker and Kirkland pointed to the importance of national defense in protecting American democracy and projecting U.S. strength abroad. In the mid-1970s, they were founding members of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), which sought to reverse U.S. military decline following the Vietnam War, at a time of growing Soviet military strength. Later, they were among the founders of ACEDAS (American Committee for Europe and Democracy and Security).⁶⁶

With Jimmy Carter's victory in the Democratic primaries and 1976 presidential election, CDM's influence began to wane. Carter ignored all of CDM's proposals for appointments to national security positions as well as its foreign policy and defense recommendations. The CDM also failed to gain significant ground through House and Senate races.

One race, however, showed that progressive union politics and a hard-line foreign policy could be combined successfully, and that was the 1976 New York Senate race. The anti-communist and pro-Israel Patrick Moynihan (famous for his vigorous opposition to a Soviet-Arab bloc resolution equating Zionism with racism while serving as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.) was running against Bella Abzug. A long-time member of Congress, Abzug was opposed to U.S. efforts to contain Soviet expansion and had voted against every House defense bill. Shanker believed that her anti-defense and anti-anti-communist liberalism would mean the reelection of conservative Republican James Buckley to the Senate. The polls supported his concern. Accordingly, the UFT endorsed Moynihan and Shanker announced the endorsement in a September 12, 1976, "Where We Stand" column bearing the succinct headline: "Only Moynihan Can Defeat Buckley and Save Public Schools." The UFT's opposition to Abzug was also rooted in bitter memories of the Ocean Hill-Bronxville strikes, when Abzug had deliberately crossed a UFT picket line. The UFT and the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council mobilized their full forces against her for the primary election.⁶⁷ Moynihan won the primary, but just by 1 percent. He proved Shanker's point two months later, however, when he went on to win the Senate seat by a significant margin.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The statement appeared as a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*. It appealed to Democrats to return to policies favoring defense, democracy, and labor.

⁶⁵ Sakharov, winner of the 1955 Nobel Peace Prize, was one of the persons Shanker admired most; he called on American teachers to make Sakharov "a classroom hero" (WWS, May 25, 1980). Sakharov had helped develop Soviet thermonuclear weapons but reconsidered his participation in the project in the late 1950s. He began advocating peaceful uses of nuclear technology, an end to weapons proliferation, and peaceful coexistence between the superpowers. In the 1960s, he became the most prominent leader of the Soviet human rights movement and in 1979 was internally exiled with his wife, also a dissident, for six years for his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He died in 1989 shortly after being elected to the All-Union Congress of People's Deputies in elections having a portion of freely contested seats. See 48-50.

⁶⁶ Interview with Roy Godson, November 27, 2012. The two withdrew from CPD as the neoconservatives, who dominated it, moved rightward and became less friendly to labor.

⁶⁷ Interview with Judy Bardacke, September 14, 2011.

⁶⁸ Shanker split with Moynihan over his sponsorship of a tuition tax credit bill aimed at helping private religious schools. Shanker and the AFT viewed this as an attack on public education and led a national campaign credited with defeating the bill in the Senate. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 210.

Moynihan's victory did not help the CDM, however. The organization eventually folded, with some of its members migrating into neo-conservatism and the Republican Party during the 1980s. Shanker never joined the neo-conservative movement, in large part because its members had abandoned the labor movement. Shanker never changed his core liberal beliefs, and was convinced that only through a centrist political alliance would it be possible for the Democrats to regain their national standing.

The Vietnam Debate

Prior to his election as AFT president, one foreign policy issue posed a significant challenge to Shanker's leadership: the Vietnam War.

The 1954 Geneva Agreement ending French colonial rule had divided Vietnam into a communist-dominated North and a non-communist South. North Vietnam, however, fomented a rebellion in the South and engaged in active military hostilities aimed at overthrowing the South Vietnamese government. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations became increasingly entangled in the region, sending military advisers, weapons, aid, and finally troops. Starting in 1964, the Johnson administration escalated America's military involvement in order to prevent a North Vietnamese victory. By 1968, there were more than 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam.

George Meany and the AFL-CIO supported the U.S. war effort—as did a majority of the country until late in the war. The AFL-CIO's position was in part a reflection of its opposition to communist expansion and in part an expression of the labor movement's essential commitment to the survival of free trade unions. Meany had viewed the 1954 agreement as “appeasement.”⁶⁹ The AFL-CIO did what it could to support a united labor federation, sending Irving Brown to meet with worker leaders and to explore means of support. But after 1954, the free trade unions in the North were taken over by the communist government of Ho Chi Minh. It happened methodically, just as in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Mao's China. Workers were forced into official trade unions run by and serving only Communist Party interests. Failure to follow the communist line meant losing one's livelihood, being sent to labor camps, or death.

In the South, the Vietnamese Confederation of Workers (CVT) survived the country's split. Although embattled, the CVT emerged as a strong independent force for workers and fought the government's authoritarianism in a number of labor actions. The CVT and AFL-CIO had many disagreements on policy and strategy, but Meany always stood by the CVT, arguing that the United States should not abandon it or South Vietnam's workers.⁷⁰

At first, Shanker did not follow AFL-CIO policy. He joined the new Trade Union Division of SANE (National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), an organization that included many of the same socialists who were part of the Committee for Free Elections in the Dominican Republic. A moderate, anti-war organization that was opposed to communism, SANE favored an Indochina policy of “de-escalation” through negotiations. By 1967, however, SANE had been taken over by radicals calling for unilateral withdrawal and support for a North Vietnam victory. SANE's director, Mary Temple, resigned with others to form a new organization, “Negotiations Now.” Shanker joined them.⁷¹

In general, Shanker's position had grown more hawkish, influenced by his socialist friends, especially Max Shachtman and his disciples, who called themselves Shachtmanites. A subset within the Socialist Party, they held perhaps the most anti-communist views in the American socialist movement. Shachtman, an appealing

⁶⁹ See AFL-CIO executive council statements on Vietnam from 1966-70 in Publications, George Meany Memorial Archives (hereafter referred to as GMMA).

⁷⁰ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 146-47.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149-50.

speaker and radical thinker, had migrated from the Communist Party to the Trotskyist movement before forming his own organization, the Independent Socialist League (ISL), which eventually merged with the more mainstream Socialist Party in 1958. As the Communist Party USA's youth secretary in the '20s, Shachtman had witnessed the rise of Stalinism during trips to the USSR. He concluded that the Soviet system was not socialism at all, but a distinct and aggressively expansionist form of tyranny that had to be vigorously opposed to prevent even greater oppression of workers. Shachtman's anti-communism, however, was deeply rooted in his socialist ideals and his followers committed themselves to the civil rights and trade union movements.⁷²

In the fall of 1965, soon after he was elected president of the UFT, Shanker hired Yetta Barsh, Shachtman's wife, to run his office. Barsh, born of Polish immigrants, had been a youth organizer for the ISL. She and Shachtman developed a relationship and married in 1954.

She remained an activist but, like many ISL wives, took a full-time job to help support her husband's radical activities. Shanker meanwhile needed a "gatekeeper" with political and organizational savvy. Barsh was recommended by friends at the UFT to be Shanker's executive secretary. She became indispensable, managing Shanker's heavy calendar, organizing his workload, and advising him on administrative and political matters. She recommended many talented young socialists for staff positions, including future UFT and AFT President Sandra Feldman. She also fostered Shanker's and Shachtman's relationship. Shanker was not a Shachtmanite, but he shared Shachtman's political interests and appreciated his political intellect and good company.⁷³

On Vietnam, the Shachtmanites took a firm position against unilateral withdrawal. They had helped form "Negotiations Now," which sought an end to the war but in a way that would preserve South Vietnam as a non-communist country. Shanker supported the "Negotiations Now" position and, more importantly, would not distance himself from the AFL-CIO's and Meany's harder line. But whatever his own views, Shanker firmly believed that the teachers' union should not take any position on Vietnam. For some liberal union colleagues, including George Altomare, it seemed wrong not to take a position on the most important issue facing the country. For Altomare, the need for opposition to the war seemed clear.⁷⁴ Shanker, however, had several reasons for proposing "no position." He did not want the union divided or distracted from its principal task of organizing and representing teachers, nor did he want to see the AFT alienated from the AFL-CIO, the union's mother ship. Shanker believed that, without a strong labor movement united within the AFL-CIO, gains in public sector unionism would not be possible. Finally, he saw no advantage in alienating the union from the more conservative voting public, especially on non-education issues.

The issue came to a head at a 1967 UFT executive board meeting. Faced with a motion to reject the AFL-CIO's pro-war stance, Shanker instead proposed that the local union take no position on the war. Despite his warnings that the issue might divide the union, Shanker lost the motion 21-20. At the AFT convention that year, George Altomare, still perplexed by his old friend's position, submitted an alternate resolution to Shanker's, one that called for the AFT to support unilateral withdrawal, to formally back the peace movement, and to register the AFT's opposition to the AFL-CIO's pro-war stance at that organization's next convention. Altomare's resolution won, but the issue divided AFT national delegates and local unions for several years.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., 146-47.

⁷³ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 62-63 and Rachele Horowitz, e-mail to author, October 23, 2012. Barsh's recommendations to Shanker included Eugenia Kemble, who directed the AFT's Educational Issues Department and later the Albert Shanker Institute Director and Horowitz herself, who was Administrative Director at the A. Philip Randolph Institute until 1974, and then served as AFT's political director for twenty-one years.

⁷⁴ Interview with George Altomare, December 12, 2012.

⁷⁵ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 148.

In 1970, the UFT executive board agreed to Shanker's proposal to conduct a mail ballot referendum of the membership. There were three choices: support for unilateral withdrawal, phased withdrawal, or taking no position. "No position" won by a large margin in that referendum, as well as in ballots in succeeding years.⁷⁶ With this mandate, Shanker proposed a similar mail referendum at the national level to avoid devoting enormous time to the issue at the convention. The proposal for a referendum won at the 1970 convention but the outcome was blurred. A change in the referendum's wording allowed members to vote for both unilateral withdrawal and no position. Each won majorities. The next year, Shanker urged the convention delegates not to adopt a definitive position when no clear position in the membership was recorded. Instead, the delegates voted for the same planks in favor of unilateral withdrawal, AFT participation in the anti-war movement, and registering AFT's opposition to AFL-CIO policy. This last point seemed to be the most distressing for Shanker. He argued that the AFT, by taking a distinct minority position within the AFL-CIO on an issue its leader, George Meany, felt strongly about, was weakening its position inside the labor movement.⁷⁷

Shanker associated the issue of Vietnam with the growing anti-establishment sentiment on the Left and a growing antipathy to the AFL-CIO among leading liberals. During the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike, Shanker had seen radicals and mainstream liberals alike hijack the issue of civil rights to try to strip teachers of their basic labor rights. Now, anti-war groups, radicals, and communist front groups were making a communist victory, not U.S. withdrawal, the measure of progressivism. Shanker could not see the morality of that position. Within the union, Shanker also saw these same radicals, including Communist Party members out of the old Teachers Union, trying to use Vietnam to weaken internal democracy and regain ground within the union.⁷⁸

In the end, there was no "winning" position. As public opposition to the war grew, continued U.S. involvement in the war became more and more untenable. Today, it appears that Shanker was wrong on this issue. Nevertheless, he (and the AFL-CIO) correctly predicted the consequences of the North's victory over the South: arbitrary executions, mass imprisonment, and a desperate and dangerous exodus of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children—creating a refugee crisis in which Shanker would become deeply engaged.

⁷⁶ See letters to AFT leaders and UFT members in 1967, 1968, and 1970, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.022, Box 26, Folder 32.

⁷⁷ Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University (hereafter referred to as Reuther Library), AFT Convention Proceedings, 1967-72, debates on international affairs resolutions.

⁷⁸ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 146-47 and AFT Convention Proceedings.

6

The AFT Presidency: A Platform for Internationalism

The increasingly chaotic atmosphere of AFT conventions—and of the union as a whole—convinced Shanker to run for president of the national union in 1974 against David Selden, his friend and onetime mentor. Selden had played a key role in gaining collective bargaining for teachers; in New York City among UFT circles, his organizing skills were legendary. Despite their growing differences, Shanker had backed Selden in all previous elections. But, in Shanker's view, as time went on, Selden's behavior had become undisciplined, willful, and erratic, especially towards the AFL-CIO. For Shanker, the Vietnam debates pointed to a clear danger that the AFT could be hijacked by more radical elements that would take it away from its roots in the labor movement.⁷⁹

The extent of Shanker's support among the AFT executive council, made up of other local union leaders, was demonstrated well before Shanker made his intentions public. Just after the 1972 AFT convention, at which Selden was reelected, the council voted to nominate Shanker to be the AFT's representative on the AFL-CIO executive council. This was highly unusual. Such a spot would normally be reserved for the presidents of the largest and most influential of affiliated unions. But, given the sour relationship between Selden and the AFL-CIO, it was highly unlikely that Selden would have gained enough votes to win the seat. AFL-CIO president George Meany and his secretary-treasurer, Lane Kirkland, were persuaded to support the idea, giving teachers a voice within the federation's most important deliberative body. In political terms, the AFT executive council had issued a vote of no confidence in Selden and had given Shanker an important new platform from which to advocate teacher unionism.⁸⁰

Six months before the 1974 convention, Selden revealed that he had conducted unauthorized discussions with the NEA which opened the door to a merger without affiliation with the AFL-CIO. This was the final straw for Shanker and his allies, by then most of the members on the AFT executive council. For most AFT leaders and members, AFL-CIO affiliation was a non-negotiable issue for any merger between the two teacher organizations.

At the 1974 AFT convention, Shanker won overwhelmingly. He had gained the support of every major AFT local president except that of Washington, D.C. Shanker remained president of the United Federation of Teachers, a plan he had announced during the campaign. He argued to delegates that an AFT president should maintain his elected base of support within the union in order to have greater authority to act nationally, something that Selden had lacked. Shanker commuted between Washington and New York for the next 12 years, resigning his UFT position in 1986.

Shanker ran on the campaign slogan of "teacher power." He argued that Selden's mismanagement, his antipathy to the AFL-CIO, and his outreach to NEA without the authority of the AFT executive council reflected

⁷⁹ Interviews with George Altomare, December 17, 2011, Rachelle Horowitz, September 23, 2011, Thomas Donahue, former secretary-treasurer and president of the AFL-CIO, June 6, 2011, and Edith Shanker, March 16, 2012.

⁸⁰ Significantly, A. Philip Randolph, the AFL-CIO's longest-serving vice-president, nominated Shanker at the AFL-CIO's 1973 convention to serve on the federation's executive council as a vice president. "[It] was the proudest moment of my life," wrote Shanker in a "Where We Stand" column devoted to Randolph after his death, May 20, 1979.

a lack of vision for the union and its members. Shanker believed that the AFT could become as powerful nationally as the UFT had become in New York, capable of organizing many more members, influencing national issues, affecting the national debate on education, and contributing to the general effectiveness of the U.S. labor movement as a progressive domestic institution in national politics. But Shanker's vision for the AFT was even larger—he believed in the union's international engagement, in enlarging teacher power at home by increasing it abroad, especially through its trade secretariat and the AFL-CIO regional institutes. He believed that the union's interests were broadly served through supporting the expansion of democracy, defending workers' rights, and combating tyranny in the world. He intended to return the union to its historical legacy, but with an exponentially expanded role.⁸¹

Immediate Engagement

Before the 1974 convention, Shanker had taken a trip to East Asia for the AFL-CIO and the Asian American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI). His wife Edith joined him for vacation. Their travel began in Bangkok and proceeded to Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. In each place, he met with labor, teacher union, and government leaders as well as U.S. Embassy staff. The main leg of the trip was an exchange tour to Japan. Shanker's primary task was to represent the AFL-CIO at the congress of Domei, Japan's social democratic labor federation. In fact, George Meany was entrusting the most junior member of the AFL-CIO's executive council with some delicate trade union diplomacy.

Japan had two labor federations. The larger one, named Sohyo, was a radical mixture of left socialists and communists. While formally tied to the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), its politics extended much farther left; it hosted communist trade unions at its congresses, supported the policies of North Korea's Kim Il Sung, and backed the radical Arab states and the PLO. Not surprisingly, Sohyo had rejected any relations with the AFL-CIO.⁸²

Instead, the American federation maintained a bilateral relationship with Domei, Japan's smaller federation which was affiliated to the more moderate Social Democratic Party. Several large Sohyo affiliates, however, had relationships with AFL-CIO affiliate unions through their trade secretariats. As well, the second largest affiliate of Sohyo, the Japan Teachers Union (known by its Japanese acronym, Nikkyoso), had elected new leadership that was openly seeking to moderate Sohyo.⁸³ AAFLI organized Shanker's tour so as to fully explore the trade union scene in Japan. He met with leaders of both labor federations and their affiliates, government representatives, and education officials. As part of the agenda, Shanker met Nikkyoso's leaders for the first time. It was the first of many such meetings and laid the groundwork for longstanding relationships. He managed to navigate between the two federations by maintaining the AFL-CIO's primary relationship with Domei while steadily developing new relationships with Nikkyoso and Sohyo. It was an example of Shanker's ability to go beyond sectarian politics in order to explore possibilities for democratic relations with different unions.

⁸¹ "Why I Am Running for AFT President," National Team for Al Shanker for AFT President, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 26, Folder 31.

⁸² James Ellenberger, "Memo on the Present Situation Between Sohyo and the AFL-CIO," AAFLI, February 1978, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022, Box 23, Folders 15-17. In 1964, George Meany attended the opening congress of Domei, but also met with the head of Sohyo. The meeting was so "hostile" that no other meetings took place until 1976.

⁸³ Interview with David Dorn, December 15, 2011, and James Ellenberger, "Memo on the Present Situation Between Sohyo and the AFL-CIO," AAFLI, 1978.

As president of the AFT, Shanker went to work on several international priorities. The first was to increase AFT involvement in the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU). Within a month of the 1974 convention, Shanker asked André Braconier to organize the next executive board meeting of IFFTU in New York, to be hosted by the AFT. The meeting was held in New York City on January 15-17, 1975, and covered the standard agenda of reports, consideration of new members, and new programs. Shanker used the meeting to immediately establish relationships with all of his teacher union counterparts abroad, especially Erich Frister, the president of the German Teachers Union and IFFTU. As part of the meeting, Shanker arranged 16 two-week labor exchanges through the State Department (with the assistance of George Meany). The exchanges allowed teacher union leaders from Latin America, Asia, Europe, and Africa not only to attend the meeting but also to gain first-hand knowledge of the United States, the American education system, and the AFT.⁸⁴

The IFFTU executive board meeting was also an opportunity for Shanker to present the situation of teachers and teacher unions in the United States and to publicly showcase the degree of solidarity that the AFT enjoyed with other countries, especially in Europe, where teacher unionism was more accepted. As a result of his presentations, IFFTU leaders asked the AFT to provide a formal list of reprisals against teachers and teacher unions in the United States. Denise Thiry, the AFT liaison to IFFTU, gathered information for just the previous fall: 24 locals had faced stiff fines and more than 300 teachers were jailed; in Wilmington, Delaware 250 teachers were placed under house arrest and fined \$100 per day for engaging in a strike.⁸⁵

The January 1975 meeting kicked off Shanker's campaign to increase the AFT's program and financial commitment to IFFTU. Few within the union, however, shared Shanker's vision for strengthening the AFT by strengthening IFFTU. The leadership and staff questioned the AFT president's commitment of resources and time to international affairs. But Shanker was determined to change their minds about the AFT's international work.⁸⁶

Education by Domestic Means

Faced with skepticism within the union, Shanker used the office of AFT president as a tool for the education of the union's leadership and staff. There was constant interaction. He gave dozens of speeches a year to locals, members, and outside groups in which he would take time to explain the AFT's and AFL-CIO's positions on domestic and international issues. He invited foreign and domestic guests to AFT executive council meetings to spotlight crucial international issues. In his first few years in office, Shanker's guests included Kurdish resistance fighter General Massoud Barzani, Yugoslav dissident Mihajlo Mihajlov, South African teacher union leader Sipran Mahlaba, Soviet dissidents Vladimir Bukovsky and Aleksander Ginzberg, U.S. plumbers' union president Martin Ward, who was the AFL-CIO's international affairs chairman, and AFL-CIO European representative Irving Brown, among others. He also invited many of these speakers to make presentations to AFT conventions, which in time drew more than 2,000 delegates. He invited IFFTU general secretaries (Andre Braconier and his successor, Fred Van Leeuwen), heads of trade union federations, and leaders of teacher unions from many different countries to address the union's executive council and

⁸⁴ Letter to Andre Braconier, Reuther Library, Box 54/12-15, and letter to George Meany, December 20, 1974, GMMA, International Affairs Department (hereafter referred to as IAD) Collection, unprocessed.

⁸⁵ Letter to Eric Vandervecken, IFFTU, September 25, 1975, Denise Thiry, Reuther Library, AFT President's Office: Albert Shanker, Box 54/12-15.

⁸⁶ Interviews with David Dorn, September 15, 2011, and Phil Kugler, the AFT's director of organizing, November 30, 2011, among others.

conventions. Phil Kugler, the AFT's organizing director since 1981, said that Shanker "looked for all sorts of ways to broaden the horizons of AFT leadership."

Shanker regularly distributed articles and other materials on domestic and international issues to leadership and staff. Sometimes, they would bear a simple note, "FYI"; at other times he wrote longer and more pointed comments to highlight the materials' importance. Two early mailings in particular signaled the change of leadership and style. In March 1975, he sent out "Labor and Détente," an AFL-CIO pamphlet that included George Meany's testimony of October 4, 1974, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Shanker wanted AFT leaders to read Meany's views on human and worker rights and the AFL-CIO's foreign policy for themselves. Meany's testimony was a tour de force, demonstrating how the federation's foreign policy was firmly rooted in workers' rights and well-being.⁸⁷

Shanker's strong desire to identify the AFT with AFL-CIO policy was reinforced by a mailing to the entire AFT membership in August 1975 of two speeches by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, delivered at dinners organized by the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., and New York. George Meany insisted on organizing the dinners after President Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger "could not bring themselves to a manly defense" of human rights and refused to meet with the 1970 Nobel Laureate for Literature. Solzhenitsyn, whose writing, more than anything else, had exposed the Soviet concentration camps to the world, was expelled from the USSR in February 1974 for his advocacy of human rights. Solzhenitsyn's speeches at the AFL-CIO dinners in New York and Washington, D.C., had been published in a special pamphlet issued by the AFL-CIO. Shanker had the pamphlet mailed to AFT members and in a cover letter wrote:

The AFT is proud of its record in supporting dissidents from various countries throughout the world in their right to speak out against totalitarianism and for freedom of conscience and expression. We are pleased to be associated with this particular action.⁸⁸

Such mailings, which Shanker continued as long as he was AFT president, were an important means for him to communicate with the leadership, staff, and membership of the AFT on union and education issues as well as on international affairs. The recipients took the mailings seriously, if only because Shanker would follow up in conversation. "He tested you by asking if you read it," said Lorretta Johnson, the AFT's current secretary-treasurer.⁸⁹

Shanker also used the AFT's wide range of publications (internal staff newsletters, the monthly publication *American Teacher*, the quarterly educational issues magazine *American Educator*, and publications of the union's different divisions) to promote an international perspective. He used them to highlight international affairs presentations to AFT meetings or for special articles or issues on international topics—the Iran hostage crisis is one example. As the international affairs department became more systematic in its human rights activities, the *American Teacher* and staff publications publicized its urgent requests for action, often prompting a large response from members.

In addition to its role promoting the AFT's Education for Democracy and Education for Democracy/International Projects (see Chapter 10), the *American Educator* dedicated several issues to international topics, especially during the period of the Eastern European revolutions, the end of apartheid, and the crackdown in Tiananmen Square. There were interviews with teacher leaders from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, South Africa, and China. Special classroom materials on these countries were also developed for use by social studies teachers.

⁸⁷ Letter of Albert Shanker to AFT executive council, March 5, 1975, and "Détente and Labor" testimony of George Meany, IAD Publication, Reuther Library, AFT President's Office: Albert Shanker, Box 61, Folder 21.

⁸⁸ Letter to members, March 1975, Reuther Library, AFT President's Office: Albert Shanker, Box 61, Folder 21.

⁸⁹ Interview with Lorretta Johnson, secretary-treasurer, AFT, November 30, 2011.

Education by Foreign Means

Another educational tool, often leaving a lasting impression on participants, was sending leaders and staff on international trips through the IFFTU, the AFL-CIO institutes, and an independent group called the Labor Desk.⁹⁰ Shanker was convinced that, by exposing the AFT's leaders and staff to the world and by having them engage with their trade union counterparts, they would appreciate the need to expand the union's role in international affairs and engage with the world's democratic struggles. The trips started almost immediately after Shanker took office as AFT president.

Initially, Shanker focused his attention on the executive committee, a small group of eight to ten leaders, mostly from the larger locals, which met monthly to deal with the ongoing work of the union. Starting in 1975, and continuing over a number of years, Shanker sent or accompanied executive committee members on trips to Germany, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Japan. The trips increased the bonds among AFT leaders through common experiences and time spent together. This included Shanker. "Al was enormously good company," said Sandra Feldman, his successor as president at both the UFT and AFT. As she described him, Shanker had a habit of finding good restaurants, sharing meals, fostering stimulating conversation, and sharing travel tips. He treated everyone equally; no one remembered him ever leaving anyone out of meals, excursions, or discussions.⁹¹

Shanker expanded participation in such trips over time to the whole AFT executive council, composed of 25-30 local and state union officers, as well as senior staff from national, state, and local unions. As organizing director Phil Kugler describes it,

Al pushed for a greater depth of understanding and appreciation of the importance of internationalism, of free trade unions, and of democracy around the world and why that is important for us to pay attention to. [International experiences] answered the question, "Why are you spending so much time on this?" They gave you a better appreciation for what you have here [in the U.S.] and for free trade union rights generally.⁹²

Lorretta Johnson's experiences are illustrative. Before becoming AFT executive vice president and then secretary-treasurer, her current position, she was president of the paraprofessionals' chapter of the Baltimore Teachers Union for 35 years. She was an early organizer of paraprofessionals and Shanker strongly endorsed her for election to the executive council in 1975. Then, "one of the first—or even the first thing—Al did was send me to Europe."

Johnson's trip was organized through the Labor Desk in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), the German taxpayer-funded party foundation of the Social Democratic Party. There were 13 members of the delegation from different unions—autoworkers, railway clerks, steelworkers, and mine workers, among others. The trips generally entailed hard work. There were four to six meetings a day focused on trade unions and politics. The trips left a big imprint on Johnson. In one work-site visit, she traveled with a colleague from the United Mine Workers five miles down into a mine. The West German union wanted to show how black lung, a major problem in the U.S., had been eliminated. (The technical means, she reports, was simply to have

⁹⁰ Interview with David Dorn, December 15, 2011. The Labor Desk, initiated by Roy Godson of the International Labor Program at Georgetown University, provided direct international educational experiences for trade unionists in order to increase understanding of the AFL-CIO's role in the world. It began as an adjunct of the U.S. Youth Council, but it became a fully independent operation. Hundreds of trade unionists took part in the programs.

⁹¹ Interview with Sandra Feldman, video presentation, "Albert Shanker: A Memorial Tribute," AFT, March 1997; interview with Ed McElroy, December 1, 2011.

⁹² Interview with Phil Kugler, November 30, 2011.

workers strip off their work clothes and shower under a heavy spray when exiting the mines). In Brussels, she met Alexander Haig, Allied Commander of NATO, who briefed the delegation on the standoff with the Warsaw Pact. In France, the group met with André Bergeron of *Force Ouvrière*, a French trade union federation, who told them about the negative impact of communist unions on French politics. The “most important meeting” in her view, though, was with Irving Brown, the AFL-CIO’s European representative, who talked about his work with “the underground to help Jews escape the Holocaust and also trade unionists.” She continued, “The stories that he told about what happened to the unions during World War II and afterwards was invaluable history for us as labor leaders coming back to America.”⁹³

But Shanker understood that one trip, while valuable, was not sufficient to provide anything near a full understanding of the international free trade union movement, its importance to democratic struggles in the world, and the necessity for the AFT to be engaged in both. In 1977, Shanker brought Johnson on a trip to Israel with Sandra Feldman, NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer Herb Magidson, and United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) President Nat LaCour for a conference on racism and anti-Semitism organized for IFFTU members by the Israel Teachers Union and its General Secretary, Shalom Levin. The conference initiated an ongoing program for IFFTU to combat these social evils. For Johnson, “The trip opened my eyes to the problems of the Jewish people in establishing their homeland.” Since that trip, she has been back to Israel four times (including with succeeding AFT presidents). In addition, she has attended congresses of both IFFTU and Education International. In her view,

All of it is intertwined. I am the person I am today because Al Shanker saw something in me that he wanted to educate so that I could carry the message to other labor people.

Lorretta Johnson’s experiences are typical of most of AFT leaders. Many also describe their trips as “life-altering” and profoundly broadening their knowledge of the world and of their understanding of the importance of freedom of association in the struggle for democracy. Among the trips that left the most lasting impressions were the ones to Germany that included tours of the Berlin Wall and visits across Checkpoint Charlie to the Soviet-controlled Eastern Sector of Berlin. Shanker called the Berlin Wall “the only education you needed” to understand the meaning of communism.⁹⁴ In 1976, Edward J. McElroy, at the time the president of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers, went on an AFT executive committee trip to Germany.

. . . [Going] from free Berlin to the Eastern Sector was a stark realization. Surrendering your passport to an East German guard on the bus and then [on the way back] seeing them use mirrors on rollers to see if anyone was hidden underneath the bus. Ultimately, they were more concerned with who was coming out than who was coming in. It says something about the kind of society that they had and it was an incredible realization when you see it. Al made sure we saw it.⁹⁵

Paul Cole, a New York state history schoolteacher and AFT executive council member, went on a similar Labor Desk trip to Germany in the mid-1970s:

Going to East Berlin had a big impact: leaving a vibrant West Berlin and going to the East. It was like walking from a Technicolor picture to black and white. Looking at the drabness and the expressions of people when they saw us. In West Berlin, people were alive and happy; in East Berlin, I didn’t see a single smile. I’ll never forget that. Everything that you imagined it was, it was.⁹⁶

⁹³ Interview with Lorretta Johnson, November 30, 2011.

⁹⁴ Interviews with David Dorn, September 15, 2011, and December 15, 2011.

⁹⁵ Interview with Edward J. McElroy, December 1, 2011.

⁹⁶ Interview with Paul Cole, December 1, 2011. Originally a member of NEA, Cole put forward the unity motion to create NYSUT. He was an AFT vice president from 1974 to 2006.

Shanker believed that if he exposed leaders to world experiences, they would more than likely learn democratic lessons. McElroy was later elected AFT secretary-treasurer from 1993 to 2004 and AFT president from 2004 to 2008. He described Shanker's educational method this way:

The great thing about Al . . . is that he never said to you, "Now I'm going to teach you this." or "Now you are going to learn this." When you got all done with an experience . . . when you left and had a chance to reflect on the experience, whatever it was, you realized how much you learned. . . . And you realized that was the reason he had you there, or brought you somewhere, or talked to you, or suggested a book.⁹⁷

This approach would apply even to the person "least close to Al on the council."⁹⁸

Shanker encouraged his leaders to go on longer, more comprehensive trips. Sandra Feldman, Shanker's right and left hands in running the UFT, was nominated to participate in two tours of Japan, a two-week trip in 1976 (sponsored by AAFLI) and a three-week 1977 study tour of the State Department's cultural exchange program. Feldman, a New Yorker out of the socialist movement, was in sync with Shanker on most things and especially on foreign policy, but only when she arrived in Japan did she realize fully why Shanker was pushing her to go. In 1974, Shanker had discovered the dynamic role the Japanese Teachers Union, Nikkyoso, was playing to lead a democratic change in orientation of Sohyo, the country's largest labor federation. Feldman learned also that Nikkyoso was considering an international affiliation with IFFTU, which would strengthen IFFTU against the WCOTP. On her return, she reported that the Nikkyoso president, Motofumi Makieda, had already made significant changes in Sohyo after being elected president in 1976, including his reversal of the Sohyo policy of inviting trade unions from communist countries to its congresses. Feldman was able to strengthen relations between the AFT and Nikkyoso as well as Sohyo.⁹⁹

Shanker used trade union exchanges for a number of other interrelated purposes, most importantly to help build IFFTU and to assist the AFL-CIO's international programs (these purposes are described more fully in Chapter 7). Shanker had an additional aim for the union's exchanges, however. They had reciprocal benefit. This was especially the case in helping the AFT's development on professional and educational issues. As Phil Kugler describes:

He was looking for connections, similarities, common goals, but also innovative ideas that could be meaningful for us in the development of union policy in how other educational systems function. For example, in France there was a [national] commitment to a robust early childhood education, something that we were trying to establish here on a federal level. This was a big part of Al's attention and focus. It was major in terms of what he was trying to do with the AFT leadership.¹⁰⁰

Shanker wrote a number of "Where We Stand" columns about policies and issues in other countries where he found positive examples of education models—Finland (teaching standards), Japan (professional development methods), France (early childhood education), United Kingdom (testing practices), and West Germany (comprehensive schooling). Several of these themes continued into the 1980s and 1990s. He also wrote about negative models that he warned against, such as the Netherlands (the system of public/private schooling), the Soviet Union and China (educational indoctrination), Japan (a lack of equal educational opportunity), and the United Kingdom (the adoption of education fads). In many cases, union-to-union

⁹⁷ Interview with Edward J. McElroy, December 1, 2011.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Sandra Feldman, "Report on U.S. Government Trip to Japan, (1977)," Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.022, Box 63, Folder 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Phil Kugler, November 30, 2011.

exchanges were developed in order to explore these issues (skills training in Germany, early childhood education in France, curriculum development in Japan, among others).¹⁰¹

Indochinese Refugees: A Humanitarian Crisis

While Shanker sought to educate his leadership through direct experiences in international affairs, he also used the power of his own example, especially by taking on significant human rights issues. The first major issue raised by Shanker as AFT president was the humanitarian crisis posed by Indochinese refugees.

Even before April 30, 1975 and the fall of Saigon, many in South Vietnam were seeking a way to escape the coming repression. American authorities on site offered little assistance, and the only way out was by boat on notoriously dangerous seas. Shanker believed that if anyone should feel responsibility for helping the refugees find safety, it should be Americans, regardless of the side one took on the war issue. But with a few exceptions, such as folk singer Joan Baez, those who opposed the war did not share this view and generally turned their backs on the refugees. In a “Where We Stand” column on May 11, 1975, Shanker compared the positions of the pro-war AFL-CIO and anti-war politicians. The AFL-CIO called for the U.S. government to accept 15,000 refugees (and later many more). Active opponents of the war, on the other hand, such as presidential aspirant Jimmy Carter and civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, said that the refugees should be returned to Vietnam. The 1972 presidential candidate, Senator George McGovern, agreed, asserting that “there was no real possibility of a bloodbath.” But the South Vietnamese who fled had plenty of reason to fear. Anyone who had been associated with the South Vietnamese government or the U.S. armed forces was subject to round-up. Hundreds of thousands of people went through “reeducation camps,” where torture and inhumane treatment was the norm. At least 165,000 people were executed. Overall, 1.2 million people were internally displaced and more than 1 million fled the country.¹⁰²

Shanker proudly pointed to the labor movement’s humane position. At a time of 9 percent unemployment, the AFL-CIO did not look inward but instead appealed for America to open its arms.¹⁰³ He quoted George Meany from a press conference:

We talk about the great bastion of democracy—freedom. We are concerned with the welfare of the peoples of the world. We are a nation of immigrants. And to turn our backs on the people who are fleeing from repression, fleeing for their lives, and to say to them that “We are going to dump them in the sea”—this to me is about as contrary to American tradition as anything I’ve ever heard of.

Shanker became closely involved with Bayard Rustin and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) on the issue of Vietnamese refugees. The IRC was founded in 1933 to assist displaced victims of fascism. After World War II it assisted refugees from both right- and left-wing dictatorships. Shanker joined its board in 1974.

The refugee problem only grew worse after 1975, prompting the IRC to create a high-level Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees to advocate for a greater humanitarian response. Shanker and Rustin both participated actively. In 1978, Shanker took advantage of a second AFL-CIO assignment to Japan to participate in an IRC-organized trip to Thailand and the refugee camps. Again joined by his wife Edith (and their daughter Jennie), Shanker went on a three-week trip that included Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. In Thailand, Shanker joined a delegation of visiting U.S. Congress members. They went to the main refugee

¹⁰¹ Exchanges focusing on foreign countries’ educational practices have continued under each succeeding AFT president. Recently, for example, AFT president Randi Weingarten took delegations on union and policy trips to Finland, to East Asia (China, Singapore, and Japan), and the United Kingdom.

¹⁰² “The Boat People,” Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boat_people#Vietnamese_boat_people.

¹⁰³ “Indochinese Refugees,” AFL-CIO executive council resolution, August 1978, GMMA, Publications, Executive Council Resolutions.

coordination center in Bangkok run by the IRC and to three camps where the different ethnicities of Indochinese refugees—Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian (both Lao and Hmong)—were staying.

The trip clearly affected Shanker. On his return to the United States, he testified before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Refugees:

The desperate methods used by those who are trying to save themselves by escaping from the ravages of Indochina [are unprecedented]. Let those who are willing to impugn the motives of the refugees ask themselves whether they can visualize conditions that would lead them to place their wives and children in frail river boats to set out on a sea voyage of hundreds of miles at the risk of never making it; or attempt to cross the Mekong river tied to inflated plastic bags after walking for days without shoes and without food through dense forests. Yet the refugees continue to come even though they know that the countries to which they are fleeing do not want them and even though they know they can be pushed back across the river or out to sea where pirates may swoop down on them stealing their belongings, raping their women, and kidnapping their daughters.¹⁰⁴

Congress passed a resolution for accepting more refugees, but President Carter's commitment was for only 15,000, one-tenth of the refugee population at the time. The number would grow exponentially. Ultimately, the administration relented. The United States became the home to 825,000 Vietnamese refugees overall.¹⁰⁵

Shanker's attention turned to Cambodia following the 1979 invasion by Vietnam. The invasion ousted the murderous Pol Pot regime and installed a pro-Vietnamese government, but it caused a new refugee crisis. Shanker and Rustin joined the Cambodian Crisis Committee, chaired by Notre Dame President Father Theodore Hesburgh, which sought to bring international pressure to bear on the Vietnamese government to allow relief supplies to be distributed to starving Cambodians in the wake of Pol Pot's auto-genocide, which had killed at least one million people. Shanker wrote two "Where We Stand" columns on the issue and on December 30, 1979, Bayard Rustin, just returning from a trip to Cambodia, wrote a guest column. Rustin reported that "[d]eath by starvation was just weeks away" for Cambodians who were being denied food relief by the Vietnamese army, which had occupied the country.¹⁰⁶

By 1980, the efforts of the Cambodia Crisis Committee, the IRC, and others had some success, as international pressure forced Vietnamese authorities to allow food and supplies to be unloaded at ports and distributed throughout the country. Famine abated and, according to Hesburgh, Cambodian farmers were allowed to plant seed provided by the CCC. Both the IRC and the CCC expressed strong appreciation for the efforts and contributions of Al Shanker and the AFT.¹⁰⁷

There were very few international issues that Shanker focused on with greater attention than the Indochinese refugee crisis. Throughout this period, he sought to educate his members through his column, through AFT publications, and through speakers at AFT and UFT Conventions and other meetings. In 1977, Leo Cherne, the legendary president of the IRC, was given the AFT Human Rights Award at the union's Boston convention; in 1978 he received the UFT's John Dewey Award. In his speech to the UFT, Cherne said:

¹⁰⁴ "Testimony of Albert Shanker, Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, House Foreign Affairs Committee," August 15, 1978, Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker Collection, Box 63, Folder 33.

¹⁰⁵ "The Boat People," Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia.

¹⁰⁶ WWS, December 31, 1978 and July 1, 1979

¹⁰⁷ "Letter of Father Hesburgh to Albert Shanker," et. al., Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 51, Folder 22.

The ultimate repository of the concern for human rights must remain with those like ourselves. . . . We must assist those wherever they can be reached who suffer the deprivations of their freedom or have risked their lives and sacrificed all that was dear to them to seek sanctuary. We must press for a constant spotlight on the prisons where those who love liberty languish and on the nations which keep prisoner entire populations which are denied human rights. Those are the obligations of free men and women.

Quoting Polish Jewish poet Edward Yashinsky, he concluded:

Fear not your enemies, for they can only kill you; fear not your friends, for they can only betray you. Fear only the indifferent, who permit the killers and betrayers to walk safely on the earth.¹⁰⁸

For the 1980 AFT convention, Shanker proposed Liv Ullman, the Swedish actress, to be given the organization's Human Rights Award for her tireless work on behalf of Indochinese refugees as the IRC's and UNESCO's global ambassador. Introducing her at the convention, he lauded "her role in the recent World Food Program distribution to Cambodian ports" and her "untiring efforts" during the food caravan to the overcrowded refugee camps on the Thai border. She was accompanied, he reminded the audience, by AFT vice president Nat LaCour. Ullman's message to the convention delegates: "lack of respect for human life cannot be allowed."

"Freedom Is Not an Internal Affair"

The human rights issue that fixed Shanker's gaze over a longer period of time than Indochinese refugees was the Soviet dissident movement. It was an ongoing concern throughout his career.

Before becoming AFT president, Shanker had also joined the board of trustees of Freedom House, a venerable human rights organization. Founded in early 1941, it sought to support U.S. participation in the war and the struggle against fascism. Its first chairpersons were Eleanor Roosevelt and 1940 Republican presidential nominee Wendell Wilkie, reflecting a commitment to a bipartisan organization. Since 1945, Freedom House has had a global commitment and a broad focus in supporting human rights, with a special focus on human rights violations in communist countries.

Freedom House became a significant forum for Shanker to express his ideas. In December 1973, Shanker was asked to speak at Freedom House's annual dinner, which had been dedicated to the Soviet dissident movement. He explained his strong support for this cause:

The Soviet dissidents must know that they are not alone in their struggle. . . . Their protest is a sharp and clear rejection of the view put forth by the cynics and so-called realists that the issue of human rights in the Soviet Union is an "internal affair." The denial of human rights is not now, nor has it ever been an "internal affair." It is not an internal affair in South Africa. It is not an internal affair in Greece. And it is especially not an internal affair in the Soviet Union—a great power whose influence is felt throughout the world. . . .¹⁰⁹

Shanker returned to the subject in his "Where We Stand" column with unusual regularity, ten columns in all. In 1973, Shanker wrote:

At the present time we are witnessing the persecution of dissidents in the Soviet Union. The fact that the Soviet Union no longer executes its dissidents testifies to its sensitivity to world public opinion. Nevertheless, its new methods are scarcely less effective in suppressing freedom. Many dissidents are

¹⁰⁸ Speech to the UFT by Leo Cherne, 1978 John Dewey Award ceremony, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.0 22, Box 68, Folder 10-14.

¹⁰⁹ Speech to Annual Freedom House dinner, December 1973, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.022, Box 64, Folder 9. Greece was under military dictatorship briefly from 1967 to 1974.

given secret trials and sentenced to years in prison or labor camps. Many others are exiled or committed to psychiatric institutions until “cured” of such insane ideas as wanting civil rights. Still others are harassed by daily attacks in the controlled government press, expelled from their government controlled “unions,” fired from their jobs, isolated and disgraced.¹¹⁰

Shanker concluded the column with a quote from Alexander Solzhenitsyn, echoing his speech at the Freedom House dinner:

There are no internal affairs left on our crowded earth. And mankind’s sole salvation lies in everyone making everything his business—in the people of the East being vitally concerned with what is happening in the West; the people of the West vitally concerned with what goes on in the East.¹¹¹

For Shanker, Solzhenitsyn’s words became a foundational belief both for him and for the international work of the AFT. Of course, everyone knew about Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov. They had won the Nobel Prizes for Literature (1970) and Peace (1975), respectively, and stood as giants among Soviet dissidents. But Shanker was determined to shed light on the fates of lesser known dissidents who would otherwise get little publicity. They included the historian Pyotr Yakir and economist Victor Krasin, founders of the modern dissident movement whose joint trial in the mid-1960s signaled the state’s redoubled campaign of repression; Aleksander Ginzberg, the founder of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, which documented violations of human rights in the accords of the Helsinki Final Act; Soviet refusenik Anatoly Sharansky and worker rights advocate Vladimir Bukovsky (who, like Ginzberg, addressed an AFT convention after being forced into exile in 1977); and worker dissidents like Vladimir Klebanov, who organized the independent trade union SMOT before being arrested.¹¹² Of all of them, Shanker had special concern for Anatoly Marchenko, about whom he dedicated two “Where We Stand” columns eleven years apart. In 1975, he wrote:

Who is Marchenko? Why is his struggle of such great importance to Americans concerned with the cause of freedom and world peace? He was born in 1938 in the town of Barabinsk in Siberia. Both his parents were illiterate railway workers and Marchenko is completely self-educated. He has already spent nine years in Soviet labor camps, . . . the basis for his book, *My Testimony*. . . [I]t describes the Soviet Concentration Camps as a living reality, not as an historical nightmare of Stalin’s time.”¹¹³

George Meany and the AFL-CIO engaged in a stubborn campaign on his behalf, without effect. Eleven years later, in October 1986, Shanker wrote a second column on Marchenko. He was still in Christopol prison but now engaged in a perilous hunger strike, directed at Mikhail Gorbachev and demanding the release of all Soviet political prisoners. Shanker called on President Reagan to intervene at an upcoming summit between the two leaders. If Reagan did intervene, the attempt was ineffective. Marchenko died a martyr on December 11, 1986.¹¹⁴

Starting in 1973, Shanker joined several committees dedicated to supporting the Soviet dissident movement, including the Committee for Detente with Freedom, which he co-chaired with Bayard Rustin, the Committee for Human Rights, chaired by Lane Kirkland, Bayard Rustin, and writer Saul Bellow, and the Sakharov Defense Campaign, among others. Over twenty years, he wrote dozens upon dozens of letters to Soviet authorities protesting the arrests of both well known and lesser known dissidents and refuseniks, including many teachers whose plight was brought to his attention. One was Yakov Suslensky, a teacher living

¹¹⁰ “Soviet Detente—and Soviet Dissidents,” WWS, September 23, 1973.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² See Appendix, Where We Stand, Columns on International and Democracy Themes.

¹¹³ “The Ordeal of Anatoly Marchenko,” WWS, April 6, 1975.

¹¹⁴ “Freedom and the Summit Agenda,” WWS, October 5, 1986.

in Ukraine who had lived through the Holocaust. In 1970, he was sentenced in secret to seven and one-half years imprisonment for “distributing anti-Soviet literature.” Late in his sentence, he was placed under psychiatric treatment, meaning torture. Shanker wrote to protest his prison conditions and to urge his early release:

If the much-heralded “spirit of Helsinki” means anything at all, it certainly means a commitment to the principles of intellectual freedom and the free exchange of ideas. We therefore urge you to act promptly.

In 1979, Shanker participated in the Sakharov Hearings, a two-day event organized by Freedom House with the financial help of the AFL-CIO and AFT. The hearings were initiated in Europe, in 1975, at the encouragement of Andrei Sakharov, who hoped that in conditions of freedom it would be possible to expose Soviet abuses of human rights protected in the Helsinki Accords. In 1979, Freedom House agreed to organize the hearings in Washington, D.C. They featured first-hand testimony of exiled dissidents as well as written testimony from individuals inside the Soviet Union. Shanker participated in all the sessions and chaired one.

What lay behind Shanker’s focus on Soviet dissidents? There was, of course, his basic concern for individuals who were being repressed for seeking to live in freedom. But there was something more. Shanker wanted to convey to the public an understanding of the true repressive character of the Soviet system and what this meant for Soviet foreign policy. He often quoted Andrei Sakharov, a man he called on teachers to make a classroom hero. In a “Where We Stand” column titled “Andrei Sakharov: We Must Support the Man—and Heed His Message” (May 25, 1980), he writes,

Sakharov exposes the notion that there is no connection between the system of internal repression and Soviet behavior in international affairs—the idea that no matter how brutal the Soviet regime is to its own people, its foreign policy is rooted in pragmatism and moderation, that it shares the desire for world peace with the free world. Sakharov disagrees. In his view, a society which maintains a vast slave labor system, discriminates against national minorities as a matter of official policy, refuses to let its own citizens travel abroad or emigrate, sends the children of religious believers to orphanages, locks up sane people in mental institutions, regards the expression of dissenting views as a criminal offence, puts the unemployed people in jail for parasitism, and takes ruthless reprisals—a system in other words which treats its own people like serfs or animals—will not hesitate to behave with similar ruthlessness against foreign countries if the opportunity presents itself.

But even more importantly for Shanker, Soviet dissidents and those in the Soviet bloc represented the one true hope to end the superpower conflict. For him, they embodied the human desire for freedom that could not be suppressed. In his 1973 speech to Freedom House, he explained:

If the dissident movement avoids being snuffed out like a candle in the night, indeed if it grows and prospers as other freedom movements in the past, then the world will be a much better and a much safer place in which to live. A democratic government in the Soviet Union will make peaceful coexistence a reality and not what it is today, an excuse for relentless military aggression. . . . At some point, hopefully, freedom will become general. It will then be accepted for what it is: not a feared and subversive doctrine but an essential condition for the flourishing of the human spirit. . . .

And in his first column on Anatoly Marchenko in 1975, he wrote:

At stake in the struggle for human rights is far more than the fate of those individuals who are now being persecuted. The possibility for world peace is also at stake.

Today the Soviet Union’s collapse may seem to have been inevitable, but in 1973 there were not many people who predicted it or spoke of the possibility of a “democratic government in the Soviet Union.” Indeed, the Soviet Union was at the height of its territorial expansion and military power. The superpower conflict continued to have real and serious consequences for human freedom, especially for those living within the Soviet bloc, as well as for Western security, military budgets, and foreign policies. Most opinion and policymakers endorsed détente—a policy that accepted the status quo and created a means of ongoing

cooperation which assumed each side's continuation. Shanker, however, looked to those small slivers of hope, in the lives and courage of dissidents and in the possible success of the human rights movement. While it was perhaps illogical to place hope in a few dozens of dissidents opposed to the all-powerful Soviet state or other Soviet bloc states, Shanker believed nevertheless in "the power of the powerless."¹¹⁵

Worker Rights and the ILO

In the mid-1970s, Shanker took additional lessons in his international affairs apprenticeship as a worker delegate to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

The ILO was created in 1919 largely due to the efforts of Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor. Gompers convinced Woodrow Wilson that the Treaty of Versailles he was negotiating to formally end World War I would not be successful without an international agency to protect workers from exploitation and, thereby, prevent social upheaval and revolution. Wilson agreed and the ILO was formed as an autonomous part of the League of Nations. The ILO was unique, having a tripartite structure of worker, business, and government representatives from each member country. Theoretically, at least, the equal participation of each sector would encourage a balanced approach to policy. It is the only international organization of its kind and the only one surviving the League's collapse (it is now an autonomous agency of the United Nations). After World War II, the ILO passed its best known conventions, No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize and No. 98 on the Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively. These joined the other core ILO conventions banning child and slave labor, providing protections for women workers, and seeking to ensure other basic standards. (There are today 189 conventions.) Each year, there is a three-week conference that reviews the adoption and adherence of ILO conventions by member countries, each having three delegations representing each tripartite partner. Custom dictates that national trade union federations choose the worker representatives, business organizations the business delegates, and governments their own delegates.¹¹⁶

By the mid-1970s, the ILO was highly politicized. The Soviet Union and Arab countries formed an anti-democratic "Group of 77" that initiated resolutions condemning Israel and blocked actions against dictatorships belonging to the Soviet-Arab alliance. The ILO's due process rules within key enforcement committees were being routinely violated. And in 1975, the Group of 77 succeeded in admitting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the ILO, despite its stateless status and terrorist activities. In November 1975, the AFL-CIO asked Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to provide the ILO director general with two-year notice of the U.S. intent to withdraw, as required by the ILO constitution. The annual conferences in 1976 and 1977 would determine whether the U.S. followed through. George Meany asked Shanker to be a worker delegate for both years. In 1976, he was joined by ILGWU President Sol Chaikin, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Lane Kirkland, and several other union presidents and staff. AFL-CIO European Representative Irving Brown headed the worker group.

The 1976 and 1977 conferences showed little improvement in ILO behavior. In 1976, the PLO was given a prominent place within the conference to address all delegates (prompting the AFL-CIO delegation to walk out with Israel's entire delegation). In the end, Lane Kirkland reported to the AFL-CIO executive council

¹¹⁵ Vaclav Havel's essay, "The Power of the Powerless," published in 1977, was among the most influential dissident texts in Eastern Europe. The full essay appears in, among other publications, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985). See also www.vaclavhavel.cz.

¹¹⁶ See Margaret McMillan's *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 95; Will Chasen's *Samuel Gompers: Leader of American Labor* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 136; and the history and structure sections of the ILO web site, www.ilo.org.

that democratic countries mostly abstained from reports by the Committee of Experts and the Committee on Application of Standards, the two committees dealing with worker and human rights. The reports made a mockery of ILO standards.¹¹⁷ Seeing no progress, George Meany asked the Carter administration to withdraw the U.S. from the ILO and suspend its financial contribution, 25 percent of the ILO's budget.

This was a rather dramatic act, and many leading newspapers editorialized against it, including the *New York Times*, which derided George Meany for interfering in U.S. foreign policy and for using a bludgeon instead of carrots.¹¹⁸ In a published response, Shanker laid out clearly the issues at stake, noting that the ILO was essential to the American labor movement as the one forum where American government and business joined American labor in a common defense of minimum labor standards. The AFL-CIO recommended U.S. withdrawal only after concluding that the ILO had stopped functioning according to its mission, turning it into a "labor farce."¹¹⁹

Two years later, the *New York Times* admitted that the "blunt approach has paid off."¹²⁰ Democratic countries and U.S. allies had stood up and been counted. While not all AFL-CIO complaints were addressed, the ILO General Assembly had adopted a resolution openly critical of job discrimination in Czechoslovakia, and other communist countries were being investigated for violations of ILO standards. The Soviet-Arab attempts to politicize the annual Conference were being rebuffed and due process resolutions were passed, including adoption of a secret ballot. At the recommendation of both the AFL-CIO and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the United States returned to the ILO in 1980.¹²¹

Shanker had participated in this key episode in ILO history: the AFL-CIO faced down totalitarian countries that had subverted one of the most important and effective international institutions ever created. When the United States returned, a stronger alliance of democratic countries restored the ILO's true mission. Shanker, however, attended the conference just one more time, in 1981, for four days. The annual three-week conference came in June, at a time of the year when he could least afford to be away. Instead, at Shanker's recommendation, AFT staff member Eugenia Kemble began participating in AFL-CIO delegations starting in 1980. She had started with the union in 1967 as a staff writer at the UFT's *New York Teacher* and was hired at the AFT in 1974 as a special assistant for educational and international issues. Her portfolio included participation in international trade union institutions. At the ILO, one of Kemble's main tasks was to help defeat the anti-Israel resolutions that arose quite regularly at ILO conferences, which she did successfully for three years (receiving the Israel State Medal in appreciation for her work). Kemble also became a regular chronicler of AFL-CIO participation in the ILO sessions for the *Free Trade Union News*, presenting all of the arcana of ILO rules and procedures in a way that made clear their importance for democratic (or anti-democratic) purposes.

The AFL-CIO and Europe

In 1974 and 1975, sudden political transitions in Portugal and Spain, two long-entrenched right-wing military dictatorships, gave rise to the establishment of democratically elected governments. In Portugal, low-ranking military officers, responding to the loss of colonial territories in Angola and Mozambique to communist

¹¹⁷ Private Collection, Eugenia Kemble, "Notes to the Executive Council on the ILO for Lane Kirkland," April 30, 1977.

¹¹⁸ "The Case for Staying in the ILO," *New York Times* editorial, October 12, 1977.

¹¹⁹ Albert Shanker, "Time to Drop Out of the Labor Farce," *Daily News*, November 4.

¹²⁰ "Time to Return to ILO," *New York Times*, editorial, September 3, 1979.

¹²¹ "Cabinet-Level U.S. Panel Urges Return to ILO," *New York Times*, February 11, 1980.

guerillas and subsequent Portuguese migration back to the homeland, overthrew the longstanding party dictatorship known as “New State.” The “carnation revolution” generated a large spontaneous civic movement. In 1975, elections were held for a delegate assembly to draft a new constitution. In 1976, the Socialist Party of Mario Soares won a resounding majority in free elections.

In Spain, the death of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in 1976 gave King Juan Carlos an opportunity to dismantle the dictatorial regime that had ruled for 40 years. He established a parliamentary monarchy and appointed Adolfo Suarez to be the interim prime minister with the task of establishing a new constitution. In 1977 Suarez’s party, the Union of the Democratic Center, won a plurality of votes in free elections and he was elected prime minister.

Both Portugal and Spain have become stable democracies with regular peaceful transfers of power. Their transitions from fascism to democracy were significant markers of the spread of democracy.¹²² Both countries, however, showed how difficult the democratic transition could be. In Portugal, the Communist Party attempted a coup that almost succeeded; in Spain, separatist movements adopted terrorist methods that aimed at undermining the state. Civil society proved difficult to build following years of control by the government over social institutions.

Previously, in both countries, only government-controlled unions had been permitted. Free trade unions, which had been fully repressed, were starting anew. The AFL-CIO and the ICFTU, which had refused to have any relations with the government-controlled unions, established ties with the new, independent unions in both countries. The AFL-CIO also established a fourth international institute, the Free Trade Union Institute, to resume programs in Europe, with a focus on Spain and Portugal. (The AFT contributed \$1,000 for start-up costs).¹²³

In both countries, a complex array of trade unions emerged along political lines (socialist, social democratic, Christian-democratic, communist, and anarcho-syndicalist). In Spain, regional trade unions also emerged in the Catalan and Basque regions. To make things even more complicated, each sector was divided along similar lines, with separate political and regional organizations of teachers, transport workers, and so on. The AFL-CIO aligned itself with trade unions tied to the Socialist and Social Democratic Parties and rejected contacts with communist unions (as it did generally). In Spain, it also worked with regional (Basque) and anarcho-syndicalist groups.

Albert Shanker had an early interest in Spain, having written his high school senior thesis on the Spanish Civil War. Beginning in 1976, Shanker went to Spain four times and to Portugal three times over a five-year period, meeting with teacher unionists and other labor and political figures, and attending conferences. On these trips, he represented the AFT as well as the IFFTU and the AFL-CIO. Following a “scouting mission,” led by Roy Godson, and his own trip in 1977, Shanker directed \$1,000 contributions to a national teacher union in Spain (FETE) and to a regional teachers’ union in Portugal. IFFTU also developed a broad program of support to teachers unions. In 1979, Shanker traveled to both countries on a formal AFL-CIO trip with Martin Ward, the chairman of the federation’s international affairs committee (part of a larger effort by George Meany to send presidents of counterpart affiliates abroad to establish union-to-union ties).

On his 1979 trip, Shanker met with the Teachers of the Northern Zone of Portugal, which was oriented towards Mario Soares’s Socialist Party. While the communist-led unions in Portugal were generally stronger,

¹²² The scholar Samuel Huntington called them the beginning of democracy’s “Third Wave” in a 1991 article in the *Journal of Democracy*.

¹²³ Shanker Letter to George Meany, 1977, Reuther Library, Office of the President: Albert Shanker, Box 9, File 16.

the Lisbon-based socialist union had greater strength in the teaching sector. In 1980, the Northern Zone teachers organized a conference of the different “zones” supported by IFFTU and the AFT, to which Shanker brought his most senior leadership (AFT Secretary-Treasurer Robert Porter, Chicago Federation of Teachers President Robert Healey, and two other AFT vice presidents).¹²⁴ Over the years, Shanker maintained an ongoing correspondence with the Northern Zone teachers as well as with the Basque union of teachers in Spain, although its application for IFFTU membership, supported by the AFT, was blocked by Spain’s national teachers’ union.

Shanker returned to Madrid in November 1980 to attend a human rights conference organized by Freedom House and the AFL-CIO. It took place around the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Madrid review meeting on human rights. The review meetings were part of the Helsinki Final Act, a security treaty between the Warsaw Pact and NATO countries signed in 1975. Acceptance of the human rights “basket” by the Soviet bloc was a trade-off for Western acceptance of arms control and territorial provisions (including recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union). The Soviets tried to prevent discussion at the human rights review meetings. The alternative conference was organized to expose fully the record of human rights violations by Soviet bloc countries.

Shanker attended the event as the AFL-CIO representative. He joined Freedom House Director Leonard Sussman, his assistant Ludmilla Thorne (the organizer of the 1979 Sakharov Hearings), Bayard Rustin, and Tom Kahn, assistant to the AFL-CIO president.¹²⁵ At the alternative conference, Soviet and other Eastern European dissidents and experts provided testimony on blatant violations of the Helsinki Accords. The head of the U.S. delegation to the review meeting, Max Kampelman, assured the conference of U.S. efforts to address human rights violations. After much stonewalling by the Soviet bloc, the official U.S. delegates succeeded in reading well- documented testimony into the record.¹²⁶

The Democracy Program

In June 1982, Ronald Reagan addressed members of the British Parliament in a speech at Westminster Hall. In it, he elaborated the idea for actively promoting democracy around the world through all its integral parts in civil society, including a free press, unions, political parties, business organizations, and other non-governmental institutions. A private commission made up of representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties, the AFL-CIO, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce had already come together to work on an initiative called the Democracy Program in order to figure out ways for using public funds through private organizations, a practice pioneered by the German political party stiftungs, or foundations, and copied in other parts of Europe.

Following the lead of Lane Kirkland, who succeeded George Meany as AFL-CIO president in 1979, Shanker supported the Democracy Program from its outset. In addition to financial support, the AFT agreed to second Eugenia Kemble to the project part-time. An assistant to the president dealing with international affairs, Kemble had already researched the structure and program of the AFL-CIO’s foreign institutes (the African American Labor Center, or AALC, American Institute for Free Labor Development, AIFLD, and Asian American Free Labor Institute, AAFLI) and was advising AIFLD on some projects. At the Democracy Program, she expanded her research to investigate the German, Dutch, and Nordic models for promotion of democratic

¹²⁴ “Proposal of IFFTU for Teachers of the North Zone, Portugal, 1979,” Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 54, Folder 15-16.

¹²⁵ Kahn was an AFL-CIO assistant to the president from 1972 to 1986. He coordinated the federation’s human and worker rights activities and its campaign to support Solidarity in Poland. He was International Affairs Department director from 1986 to 1992.

¹²⁶ “History of Freedom House,” www.freedomhouse.org; interview with former director Leonard Sussman, August 15, 2011; interview with David Dorn, December 14, 2011.

institutions to see how they might fit with current U.S. structures. She carried out a “capacity study” of the different U.S. institutions to do programs overseas. And she helped to devise a funding formula that would provide the AFL-CIO institutes with additional funds.

The Democracy Program recommended the establishment of a new institution, the National Endowment for Democracy, which would be publicly funded but privately run by an independent board. The four core institutions (the Democratic and Republican Parties, AFL-CIO, and Chamber of Commerce) would carry out most of the activities. The NED’s aim would be the promotion of democracy and support of democratic institutions abroad. Despite the steady backing of President Reagan, the endorsement of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and lobbying by the AFL-CIO and the Chamber of Commerce, the NED was almost stillborn. Just months after winning approval in both houses of Congress and being signed into law, the House of Representatives voted to cut off funds. The AFL-CIO “did the heavy lifting” to reverse the vote in Congress, restoring NED’s budget of \$31 million, according to Greg Humphrey, the AFT legislative director at the time. “It was the only institution with a real base.”¹²⁷ Shanker assisted the AFL-CIO with telephone calls and a trademark column, “Why Not Nurture Democracy Abroad?” (June 24, 1984). He wrote:

[W]herever people are free to vote and choose their own form of government, they never choose the Soviet model. But nevertheless that model expands because it can use armed force without fear of internal criticism. It can spread money to its agents and sympathizers in other countries without worrying about press leaks or internal political dissension over who is getting the money or whether the projects are worthwhile. In any struggle, if one side is doing something while the other is doing little or nothing, the outcome is clear. . . . We can either do something to promote democracy around the world or decide to do nothing.

Along with Lane Kirkland, Albert Shanker was appointed to NED’s founding board of directors, where he served for three terms. He attended the meetings as regularly as he could, especially to defend labor’s programs and independent programs of allied organizations such as those of the Committee in Support of Solidarity (see Chapter 8).

Shanker was an even more active member of the Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI) Board of Directors, which he joined in 1983. He supported the appointment of Eugenia Kemble to be FTUI’s executive director, overseeing the substantial AFL-CIO program funded by NED. In this capacity, she facilitated funding for AALC, AIFLD, and AAFLI, expanded many of FTUI’s own regional programs, and administered funds to European grantees, especially to the Polish Solidarity union movement.¹²⁸ Shanker also encouraged participation in the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), supporting Lane Kirkland’s nomination of Rachelle Horowitz, then the AFT’s political director, to serve on NDI’s board (she later became vice chairperson). AFT vice president Nat LaCour also served on the NDI board as does current AFT President Randi Weingarten.

While the AFT financed a number of its own activities, many of the AFT’s specific programs were made possible through the additional support of NED and FTUI and the supplemental funding of the other AFL-CIO institutes.

¹²⁷ Interview with Greg Humphrey, November 29, 2011.

¹²⁸ Private Collection, Eugenia Kemble.

“In any struggle, if one side is doing something while the other is doing little or nothing, the outcome is clear. . . . We can either do something to promote democracy around the world or decide to do nothing.”

Albert Shanker, 1984

7

IFFTU: A Platform for International Solidarity 1974-1981

In 1926, a grouping of mostly European social democratic trade unions in the education sector formed the International Trade Secretariat of Teachers (ITST). The ITST dissolved during World War II, and in 1951, a new trade secretariat, the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions was formed. Separately, also in 1926, education associations not wanting to be considered unions, such as the National Education Association in the U.S., formed the World Federation of Education Associations, later renamed the World Organization of the Teaching Profession. Then, in 1951 also, the renamed group merged with two similar organizations to form the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP). IFFTU and WCOTP would be rivals for the next 50 years.¹²⁹

IFFTU formed part of the worldwide split in the international trade union movement that occurred after World War II. Like the original teachers' secretariat, the International Federation of Trade Unions, established in 1919, became a victim of World War II. In 1944-45, in the spirit of the newly created United Nations and the wartime alliance of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the USSR, an effort was made to create a single international union organization that included both communist and non-communist labor federations. It was called the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The American Federation of Labor (AFL) refused to join on the grounds that Soviet-modeled unions were antithetical to free trade unionism and would immediately undermine democratic trade unions. But the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) as well as some European social democratic organizations joined. It soon became apparent that the AFL was right. The Soviet Union sought to dominate the new federation to use for its own purposes, namely to carry out a policy of confrontation with the West. Most non-communist federations withdrew from the WFTU, including the CIO, and in 1949, at the initiation of the AFL, these non-communist federations established the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).¹³⁰

Most trade secretariats experienced a split along similar lines. In the education sector, the WFTU-affiliated secretariat was called the World Federation of Teachers Unions (known as FISE). The free teachers' unions that left FISE formed the IFFTU in 1951. The new federation associated itself with the ICFTU. The IFFTU wished to be clear about the distinction between itself and FISE. Its constitution committed IFFTU affiliates to uphold "the objectives and methods of free trade unionism and the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Members had "to practice internal democracy in the general management and running of affairs."¹³¹

¹²⁹ "The IFFTU: 1926-1993: A Tradition of Trade Unionism, A Vision for Education," IFFTU brochure, 1993.

¹³⁰ See, among others, "IFFTU Archives" at the Institute for Social Analysis (Gent, Belgium) website, <http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/i/ARCH00622full.php>. Coming full circle, in 2006 the ICFTU merged with the Christian Democratic World Confederation of Labor to form, again, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). The WFTU still exists, representing trade unions from undemocratic countries.

¹³¹ Constitution of IFFTU, 1951 (revised 1972). Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (hereafter referred to as FES) Archives, IFFTU Collection.

As noted previously, Shanker wove much of AFT international activity around the IFFTU, which was its sectoral international umbrella. While the AFT's heightened involvement clearly helped the IFFTU, the benefits for the AFT were also apparent. The IFFTU allowed the AFT to expand its influence in professional and trade union issues, to participate in international struggles for freedom and democracy, and to increase opportunities for AFT officers and staff to improve their knowledge and leadership abilities.

The 11th Congress of IFFTU in 1975, held in Florence, Italy, was an early opportunity to further these goals. Shanker attended the Congress with Robert Healey, president of the Chicago and Illinois Federation of Teachers, and Thomas Hobart, co-president of the New York State United Teachers, and two others. By 1975, IFFTU membership had reached the two million mark, a major milestone for the federation. Although still just one-fifth the size of the WCOTP, IFFTU's increased membership reflected a continuing trend line upwards from the late 1960s (when it had only 300,000 members and 17 affiliates), to 1975 (54 organizations). Shanker was working with Braconier on two additional targets—the Nigerian teachers union, which had reached out first to the AFT before soliciting the IFFTU, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), one of Canada's largest teacher unions.¹³²

A German Partner

On both policy and programmatic issues, Shanker developed a strong relationship with Erich Frister, IFFTU's president from 1973 to 1981. First a teacher and then a headmaster, he joined the German Education Union (GEW) in 1950 and immediately became active in its affairs. By 1968, he was elected the GEW's president and served in that post also until 1981. Frister was from a certain mold of Germans: a firmly anti-Nazi and anti-communist social democrat. For Shanker, Frister was a natural counterpart.

The two leaders both wanted German-American relations and they organized what became nearly annual exchanges between the two unions—a practice continued for almost two decades. For both Frister and his successor, Dieter Wunder, it was important to expose their leadership to the United States and to U.S. trade unionists, a community similar in outlook to themselves. Shanker wanted “to make sure the executive board knew what this was all about.”¹³³

In addition to Frister, Shanker developed strong relations with most of the other IFFTU executive committee members, including Shalom Levin of the Israel Teachers Union, Terry Casey of the British teachers union (NAS/UWT), Jacques Pommataut, Yannick Simbron and Guy Leneuannic, general secretaries of France's Federation of National Education (FEN), Alain Mouchoux, FEN's national secretary, and Michiro Makieda and Tanaka Ichiro of the Japanese Teachers Union (Nikkyoso).¹³⁴ There were exchanges or meetings in each of these cases, with the AFT hosting reciprocal visits by the foreign unions. As a result, the leaderships in each of the partner unions were well aware of the conditions and challenges in each others' countries.

Exchanges to Missions

As Shanker grew more assured of his staff's and leadership's understanding of international affairs, he expanded their role to larger missions. In one case, Shanker sent Herb Magidson, NYSUT secretary-treasurer—

¹³² IFFTU publication, XI Congress, Florence, FES; IFFTU Collection; correspondence with Braconier, Reuther Library, Office of the President, Albert Shanker, Box 51.1 and Box 55.1.

¹³³ Interview with Eugenia Kemble, June 6, 2011.

¹³⁴ Shanker had a particularly close relationship with Tanaka, despite the fact that neither knew the other's language. Interview with David Dorn, December 15, 2011.

a relative novice in international affairs but already a union veteran—on a scouting mission to one of IFFTU's largest members. He recalled:

My very first trip for the union was to Bangladesh in 1979. It was a year after I was elected an AFT vice president. There was an IFFTU affiliate, the Bangladesh Teachers Union, which was one of the largest unions in the country. Al wanted me to find out more for IFFTU. The president took me outside of the capital, Dhaka, to a number of places. It had the feeling of a democratic national union. Which is what I reported.¹³⁵

Magidson became one of Shanker's most trusted lieutenants on international affairs. He headed the AFT's international affairs committees in the 1980s and 90s and represented the union on trips to more than 40 countries. "It was because Al exposed me to all this that it became obvious what was important in the world."¹³⁶

Shanker increased the AFT's participation in training programs for fledgling teacher unions abroad. The AFT's organizing director, Phil Kugler, championed the involvement of his organizers in international affairs activities to such an extent that, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, more than a dozen AFT organizers, trainers, and other staff were taking part as trainers in AFT and IFFTU programs each year. AFT organizers especially were seen as well prepared to teach nuts-and-bolts unionism in developing countries such as Ghana, Malaysia, and Guatemala and later in Eastern Europe and South Africa. To finance such programs—with foreign travel and conference costs, each ran in the tens of thousands of dollars—Shanker negotiated with the three AFL-CIO international institutes, AALC, AAFLI, AIFLD, and later with FTUI, to increase their support for AFT and IFFTU international training programs. By 1979, the funding to the AFT from each of the institutes had almost quintupled, to \$271,000 per year.¹³⁷

The results of the training programs were mixed, as might be expected. Some unions responded more than others. But the volume of activity expanded the IFFTU's reach tremendously. Over this period (1974-1980), there were IFFTU-related training programs in approximately 50 countries and annual regional conferences in Africa, Asia, and South America. As a result of this expanded reach, IFFTU membership increased substantially.¹³⁸

Human Rights and Anti-Racism Committees

One of the most important projects of Shalom Levin, the long-time president of the Israel Teachers Union, was to establish regular IFFTU-sponsored international conferences on racism and anti-Semitism. The first such event—the International Teachers' Conference to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Violations of Human Rights—was organized in Tel Aviv on November 10-14, 1980. (Including Shanker, seven AFT executive council members attended.)

Earlier, Shanker had proposed the establishment of a human rights committee to Frister which could translate IFFTU's human rights concerns into action. At the July 1979 IFFTU executive committee meeting in San Francisco, Shanker discussed a range of activities that IFFTU could undertake: preparing dossiers on countries where human rights were being violated; cooperating with human rights organizations in cases involving teachers and students; lobbying UNESCO and the ILO with comprehensive reports on the education sector; and actions to defend individual cases of human rights violations. The second part of his proposal was

¹³⁵ Interview with Herb Magidson, June 6, 2011.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ See proposals, budgets, and contract letters for AAFLI, AIFLD and AALC. Reuther Library, AFT President's Office, Series VII (International), Boxes 51-54.

¹³⁸ Ibid. See also correspondence with IFFTU.

“education about human rights and democracy.” The IFFTU, he argued, should be influencing its members to lobby for adoption of human rights and democracy curricula. He encouraged the development of curricular materials on human rights and an information clearinghouse on education for human rights.¹³⁹ The human rights committee met first in New York in early 1980; after its second meeting in Tel Aviv the next year around the racism and anti-Semitism conference, it met irregularly.

Much of the systematic human rights work that Shanker envisioned was never carried out, mostly because of the IFFTU’s limited staff resources. Still, Shanker’s initiative imprinted human rights on the IFFTU as a central theme, giving it meaning beyond increasing its number of affiliates. This would later be seen in many of the activities undertaken both by the IFFTU and the AFT in the 1980s, in countries such as Chile, Poland, and South Africa (see Chapters 8 and 9).¹⁴⁰

The Philippines Congress

In 1978, the IFFTU held its 12th World Congress in the Philippines. The location was problematic. The country was under the firm grip of Ferdinand Marcos. Worse, the IFFTU was not trying to help an independent union by holding its congress there. Rather, IFFTU General Secretary André Braconier was trying to bring the host organization, the Philippine Public School Teachers Association (PPSTA), which was headed by the Philippines minister of education and wholly subservient to the dictatorship, into the IFFTU. Braconier was by now preoccupied with numbers, willing to sacrifice principle in the IFFTU’s competition with the WCOTP.¹⁴¹

Ferdinand Marcos was asked by PPSTA to deliver the keynote address. Following his speech, a young teacher unionist from the Netherlands, Fred Van Leeuwen, spoke from the floor. He asked why the IFFTU had chosen to hold its congress in a dictatorship and to allow the dictator the pride of place as keynote speaker. The delegates, he said, should be making visits to political prisoners instead. The hosts were shocked by such effrontery. Several unknown people began closing in on Van Leeuwen in a threatening manner. Immediately, Al Shanker (at 6’4”), Erich Frister, NYSUT officers Thomas Hobart, Herb Magidson and Antonia Cortese, and David Dorn, an AFT-supported staff person at IFFTU (who was also 6’ 4”), circled around the diminutive Van Leeuwen to head off any attempt to expel him or lead him away. “I discovered right there that the AFT was a giant in terms of human rights,” said Van Leeuwen.¹⁴²

The incident launched Van Leeuwen’s career within the IFFTU. He was still quite young, 28, and without much union experience. He had taught elementary school in Utrecht before starting to volunteer for the union. From the outset, he had an international orientation towards unionism:

For me union membership was more than just defending your interests as a teacher, but also a way to defend political ideals. . . . In 1974, just after the Yom Kippur War, I requested that the ABOP [General Union of Education Personnel] strengthen their bilateral relations with the Israeli Teachers Union (ITU). It was when I had met in Tel Aviv with Shalom Levin, general secretary of the ITU, and we both worried that the traditionally strong links between the Dutch and Israeli trade union movements could

¹³⁹ Letter to Erich Frister, August 14, 1979, FES Archives, IVFL Correspondence II, Correspondence 1979-May 1980 and IFFTU executive board minutes, July 1979. Many of Shanker’s ideas were later incorporated into the AFT’s Education for Democracy Project, which addressed to a U.S. audience, and the Teachers Under Dictatorship and Education for Democracy International Projects, part of the International Affairs Department. See Chapters 8 and 10.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

¹⁴¹ Interviews with David Dorn, September 15, 2011, and Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

¹⁴² Antonio Cortese, April 2, 2012, David Dorn, September 15, 2011, Thomas Y. Hobart, March 2, 2012, and Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

be affected. To my surprise, ABOP welcomed my suggestion. Not long after that I was elected on the national executive board and seconded for a couple of days a week to the headquarters of the union in Amsterdam. "International affairs" became one of my responsibilities. It is how I came to be in Manila.¹⁴³

On January 1, 1981, André Braconier died suddenly at age 57 of pancreatic cancer. Shanker wrote of Braconier's "tireless efforts to build" the IFFTU. Whatever his later missteps, Shanker and other IFFTU leaders had real respect for him. In Braconier's 14 years as general secretary, IFFTU membership had grown to more than 5 million members and 60 affiliates.¹⁴⁴

After Braconier's death, Van Leeuwen, who had worked on the IFFTU's European development since Manila, was named interim general secretary with the expectation he would be elected to a full term at the IFFTU World Congress the next December. Shanker then made known his intention to run for president to succeed Erich Frister, who was retiring.

There was some concern over Van Leeuwen's relative youth and inexperience. His international experience and involvement with IFFTU had been brief. He also became tagged as an "AFT" appointment. The French teachers' union, FEN, made noises about the IFFTU becoming an AFT-centric organization. Van Leeuwen had aroused suspicion because, at a time of growing anti-Americanism in Europe, he had not evidenced any particular anti-American sentiments and had cooperated on American-funded programs. In reality, though, Van Leeuwen modeled his actions on Braconier's own approach. A third issue arose over Van Leeuwen's sexual orientation. According to Van Leeuwen, some within the AFT and other key unions raised questions as to whether he could be effective working in the developing world, where his homosexuality might rouse greater hostility than in Europe. Van Leeuwen thought it was a non-issue ("One doesn't enter the country with homosexual stamped in the passport," he said). He declined a request by Erich Frister to withdraw his candidacy. Meanwhile, Van Leeuwen's union, ABOP, threatened to withdraw from the IFFTU if he were rejected due to his sexual orientation. For Shanker the issue of Van Leeuwen's sexual orientation was unimportant. He did consider withdrawing as a candidate for president because of FEN's concerns over American domination, but he decided that placating anti-American feeling would set a bad precedent for AFT's participation in the IFFTU (and for American labor's participation in trade secretariats generally).

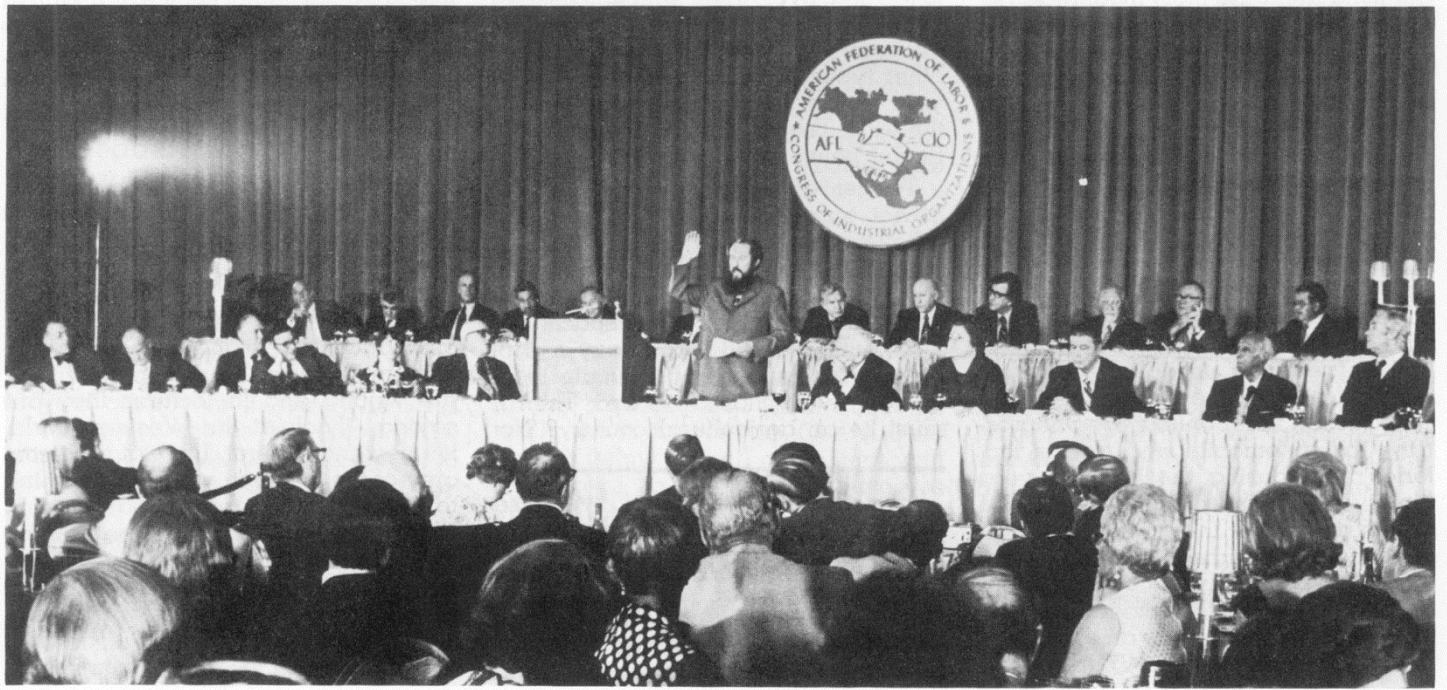
At the December 1981 World Congress in Panama City, Panama, Shanker and Van Leeuwen were both elected overwhelmingly as president and general secretary, respectively.

¹⁴³ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Telegram to Mrs. Braconier, January 1, 1981. Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 54, Folder 17; "International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions" pamphlet, 1983, EI headquarters.

“The Soviet dissidents must know that they are not alone in their struggle. . . . Their protest is a sharp and clear rejection of the view put forth by the cynics and so-called realists that the issue of human rights in the Soviet Union is an ‘internal affair.’ The denial of human rights is not now, nor has it ever been an ‘internal affair.’ It is not an internal affair in South Africa. It is not an internal affair in Greece. And it is especially not an internal affair in the Soviet Union—a great power whose influence is felt throughout the world. . . .”

Albert Shanker
Freedom House, 1973

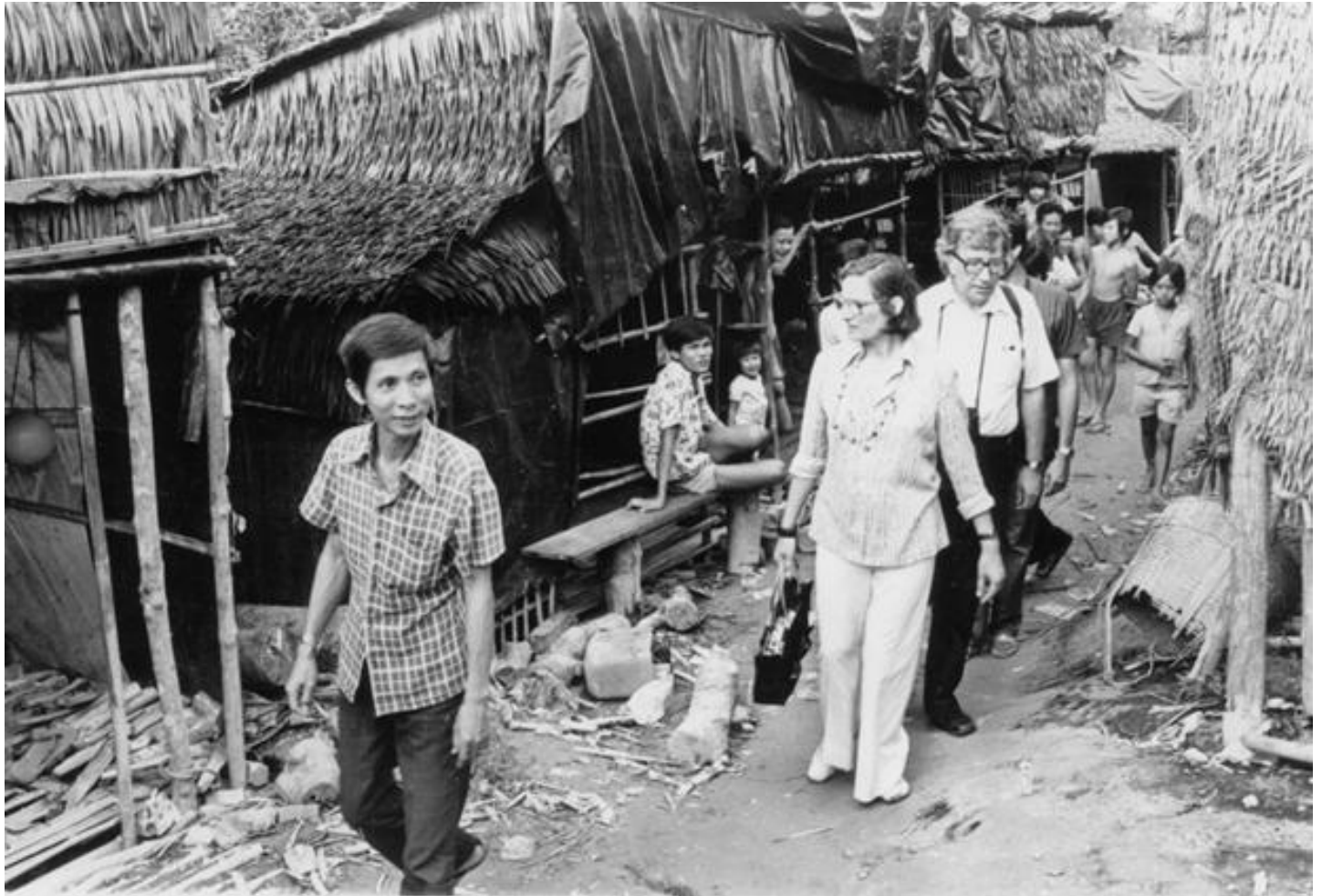


Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn delivered two addresses to the American people in Washington, DC, June 30 and New York City, July 9, 1975, under the sponsorship of the the AFL-CIO. Credit: AFL-CIO Free Trade Union News, Vol. 30, No. 7-8. July-August 1975.





Albert Shanker, Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph (circa 1979).Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library.



Eadie and Albert Shanker touring the refugee camp of Laem Sing, Thailand. July 10, 1978. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library



Albert Shanker and AFL-CIO President George Meany, 1978. Credit: Photoimagery.



Albert Shanker speaking before the Jewish Labor Committee. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library.



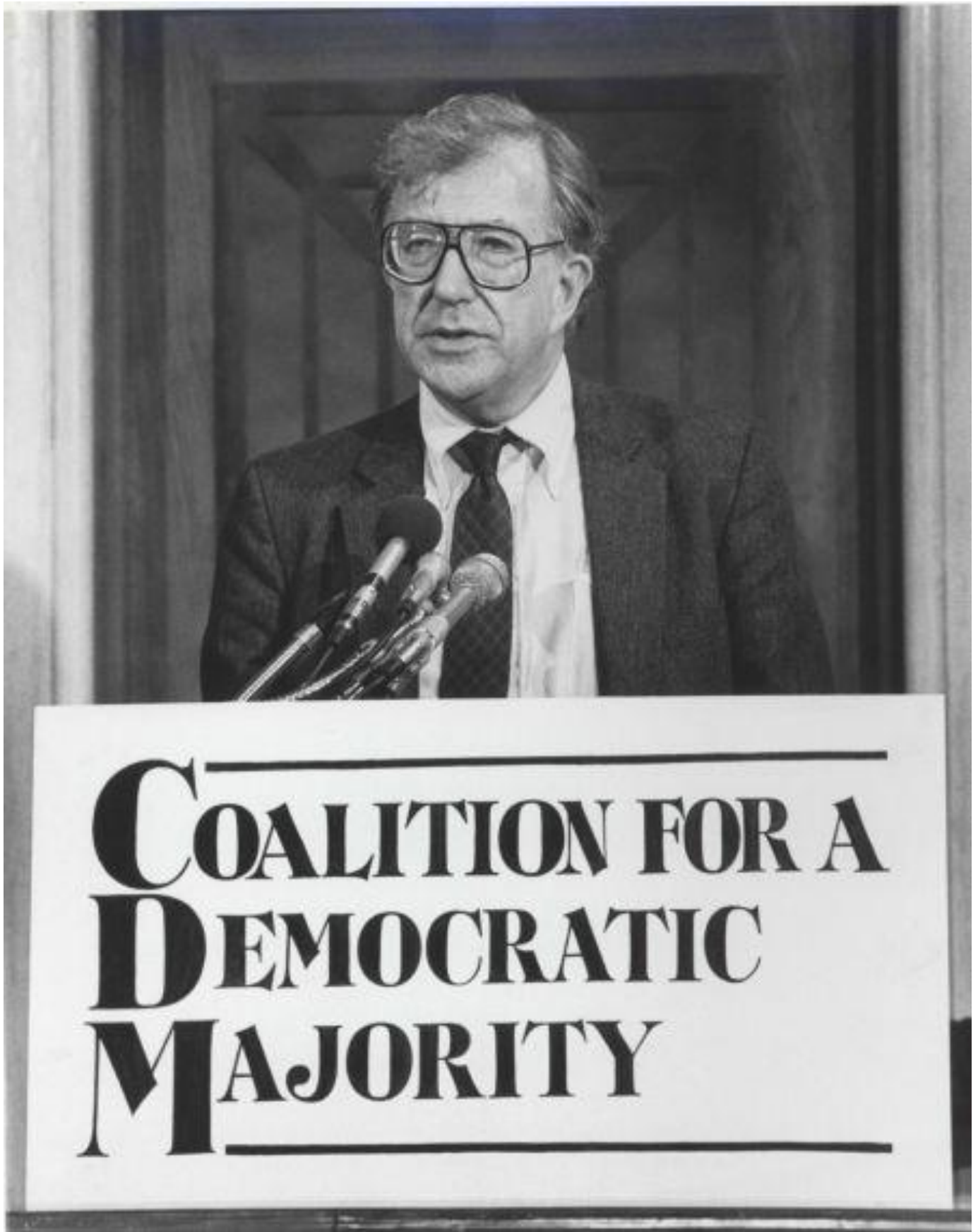
AFT president Albert Shanker speaking with Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, and Bayard Rustin, 1980. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library.



Paul Cole, Liv Ullman and Albert Shanker at the 1980 AFT Convention. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library



President Jimmy Carter and AFT President Albert Shanker at the 1980 AFT Convention. Credit: Russ Marshall.



Albert Shanker at the CDM Henry M. Jackson Memorial Symposium, 1984. Credit: Rebecca Hammel



Albert Shanker walking the line in a 1984 anti-apartheid demonstration in front of the South African embassy in Washington, D.C.
Credit: Michael Campbell.



International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU) Executive Committee President, Albert Shanker, addressing the opening session of the 14th World Congress of the IFFFTU in Marseille, France, 1985.



AFT and IFFTU Executive Committee President Albert Shanker, Eadie Shanker, and Fred Van Leeuwen, General Secretary of the IFFTU Executive Committee, in Amsterdam, April 1986.



Albert Shanker speaking to the plenary of the International Human Rights Conference, 1988 in Nowa Huta, nearby Krakow, Poland. Credit: IDEE.



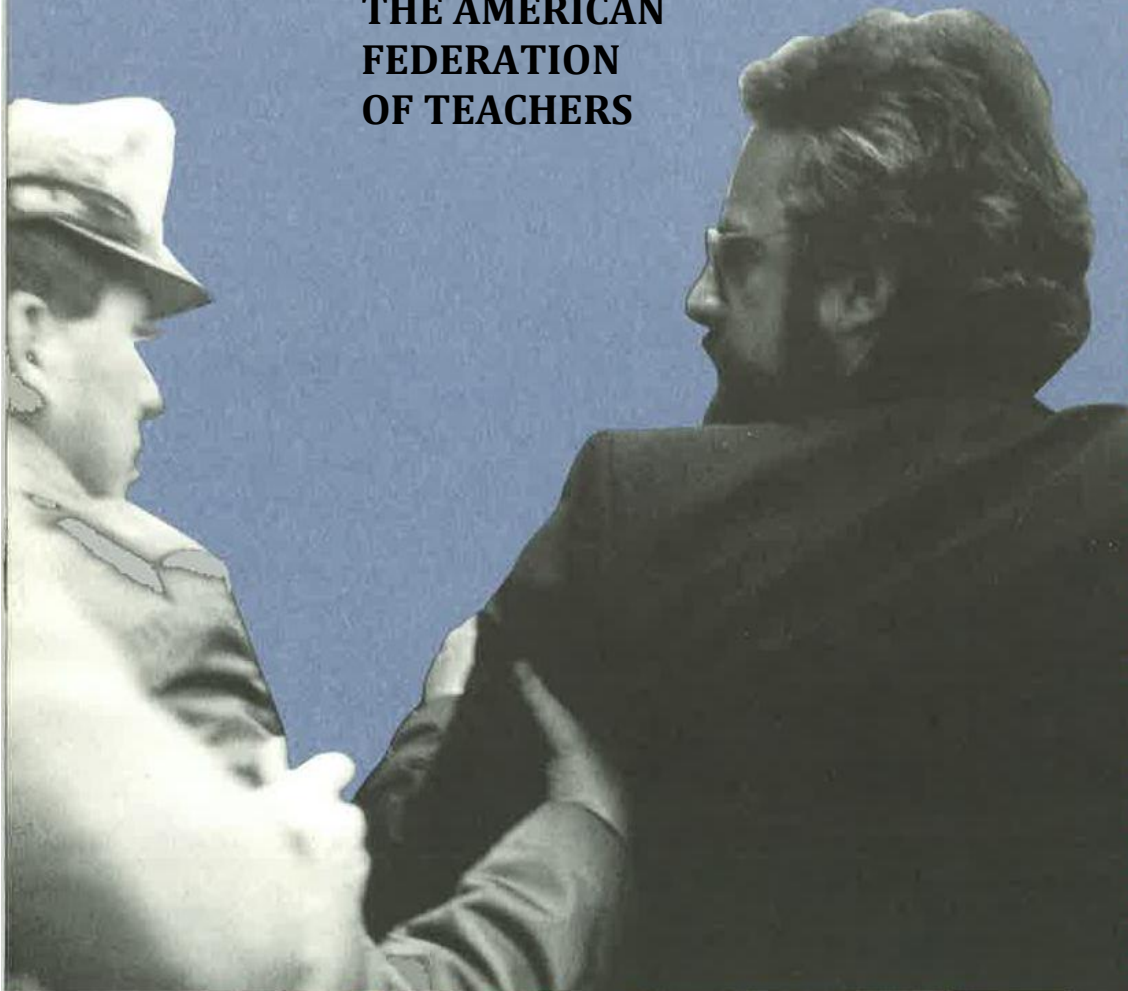
Albert Shanker, Ludmilla Thorne from Freedom House, Andrei Sakharov and Lane Kirkland, President of the AFL-CIO, at an AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting, 1989. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library.



Albert Shanker reciting the Kaddish prayer at the ruins of the Birkenau “gas ovens” as part of a visit of participants of the International Human Rights Conference to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing complex, where an estimated 2.1-2.5 million Jews were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust. Credit: IDEE.

Teachers Under Dictatorship

**A PROJECT OF
THE AMERICAN
FEDERATION
OF TEACHERS**



The cover of a pamphlet of the AFT's Teachers Under Dictatorship Project. The photo shows Chilean teacher leader Osvaldo Verdugo being arrested by police in 1988 for demonstrating against the Pinochet dictatorship.



Albert Shanker shaking hands with Lech Walesa at an AFL-CIO convention. Credit: Walter P. Reuther Library.



Chilean teacher leader Osvaldo Verdugo (left), Polish Solidarity leader and head of its independent education movement Wiktor Kulerski (center), and Albert Shanker acknowledge cheers from delegates at the AFT's 1990 convention. Credit: AFT/Michael Campbell.

8

Institutionalizing International Affairs at the AFT 1981-1997

When Shanker was elected AFT president in 1974, the union's international work was organized directly out of the AFT president's office. For five years, Shanker relied on his staff assistants to carry out necessary tasks. At first, Denise Thiry remained as liaison to the three AFL-CIO institutes and administrator of funds for IFFTU programs. In 1976, after Thiry returned to her original job at the Postal, Telegraph, and Telecommunication International, Al Lowenthal, a holdover from David Selden's staff, assumed more international affairs responsibilities. But as these activities grew larger and required more oversight, Shanker lost trust in Lowenthal and, as noted earlier, he turned to another assistant, Eugenia Kemble, to represent the AFT in international meetings and coordinate international activities.

Meanwhile, in 1978, IFFTU general secretary André Braconier appealed to the IFFTU executive committee for staff. The three largest members—FEN, GEW, and AFT—agreed to each fund a staff person to work in the Brussels office. For the AFT person, Shanker negotiated an arrangement that the three AFL-CIO regional institutes (AALC, AAFLI, AIFLD) split costs for a full-time salary as part of their overall funding of AFT international programs. Roy Godson, director of the International Labor Program and the creator of the Labor Desk, suggested a young staff member, David Dorn, to Shanker for the position. Dorn began his career in international affairs by serving two years in the Peace Corps before returning to studies at the Denver University School of International Studies. There he reconnected with a Peace Corps associate, David Jessup, who at the time was an organizer for the AFL-CIO youth group Frontlash. Dorn agreed to be the Frontlash representative at the U.S. Youth Council (USYC), an association of political and non-political youth organizations. He subsequently became USYC's director and president. After he had completed those obligations, Godson hired Dorn to work part time for the International Labor Program.¹⁴⁵

Shanker, familiar with Dorn from his involvement in social democratic circles, followed Godson's recommendation. Dorn went to Brussels as the AFT-supported staff assistant to Braconier. He joined Elie Jouen of FEN. The GEW increased its funding of IFFTU instead of sending a staff member. At IFFTU, Dorn took quickly to the new job of developing programs. He reported quarterly to Shanker about different trainings and conferences in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Fluent in Spanish, he did best with the Latin American programs. He saw potential for growth and asked Shanker to involve various AFT staff in IFFTU missions. He also recruited people from other IFFTU affiliates, including the ABOP's Fred Van Leeuwen (who carried out a training program in the Dutch Caribbean in 1978).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Interviews with David Dorn, September 15, 2011 and Roy Godson, Nov. 4, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Institutionalizing International Affairs

At the AFT, meanwhile, there was a logjam. Kemble did not have much time for her new international affairs responsibilities. She committed herself mainly to representing Shanker at international union meetings. Shanker, however, still wanted to make international work a permanent part of the union. Legislation, politics, and organizing all had separate departments; so should international affairs. In late 1980, he asked Dorn, now with almost two years' international union experience at the IFFTU, to return to the United States to start an international affairs department for the AFT. Dorn came in March 1981. "Al hired me because he knew I shared his ideology" said Dorn. "He wanted someone who would help him support democratic forces in the international labor movement and generally."¹⁴⁷

Shanker had spent seven years educating the executive council on the need for AFT involvement in international work, and there was, in fact, general agreement on the union's overall direction. Even so, while a number of unions had staff members working on international affairs, it was unusual to start a separate department with a fixed budget. People did not think of international affairs as equally important as organizing or professional issues.

"First and foremost," recalls Dorn, "[Shanker] said I had to build a base in the union for international affairs work." To do this, Dorn would have to go beyond organizing educational exchanges and involving top leadership in IFFTU congresses—although these remained essential activities. Shanker said that he needed to involve the leadership in "great democratic struggles" where the AFT's and IFFTU's strength in numbers could make a difference.¹⁴⁸

The AFT international affairs department did make a difference in dozens of countries. It organized protests and petitions, contributed to human rights campaigns, trained scores of free teacher unionists, and provided direct support to repressed free teacher unions and unionists, among other activities. Its interventions in a wide array of countries—including the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong, Fiji, Georgia, Ghana, Iran, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia (and the USSR), Sierra Leone, South Korea, Thailand, the USSR, and Zimbabwe, to name just a number of cases—had a real impact.

There were three countries in which the AFT and its international affairs department were particularly effective: South Africa, Chile, and Poland. In each case, Shanker and the department involved leaders, staff, and members in concrete actions contributing to each country's political transformation.

South Africa

South Africa was one of the new department's first assignments. Shanker had wanted to get the AFT involved there for some time.

South Africa was among the world's most repressive dictatorships. But, for anyone committed to civil rights and equality, the apartheid regime in South Africa was particularly odious. The white minority (Afrikaners), who held the most power, imposed vicious racist laws against the powerless majority of black, coloured (mixed race), and Indian citizens (in total, 80 percent of the population). There was particular harshness against black Africans. The policies of apartheid—separateness—meant that most blacks had to live in shantytowns or in equally bleak "Bantustans," so-called self-governing homelands organized according to tribe.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with David Dorn, June 8, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

In 1966, Shanker put the UFT strongly on the side of the anti-apartheid movement when, in response to the appeal of American civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, he withdrew the union's funds from Chase Manhattan Bank in protest of the bank's business ties with South Africa. He had also invited South African teacher union leader Sipran Mahlaba to address the AFT executive council and AFT Convention in 1977. Aside from letter writing, though, the hard question was how best to put the AFT in a position to support a multiracial democracy in South Africa.

For Shanker, there was never an "either/or" approach to foreign policy or democracy promotion. Herb Magidson, former chairman of the AFT's Democracy Committee, described his approach succinctly: "[He] was an equal opportunity opponent of dictatorships whether of the right or the left."¹⁴⁹ For the most part, his approach also reflected his membership, which was highly politically aware. The membership had a particularly strong concern regarding South Africa and Shanker made sure the issue was prominently addressed in conventions, in union policies and resolutions, as well as in the AFT's actions.¹⁵⁰

The union's policies and programs often put the AFT at odds with the U.S. government (and not just on South Africa). The South African regime tried to align itself with the West as a bastion of anti-communism in Africa. Most democratic countries rejected this alliance, but the U.S. considered itself to be in a strategic quandary as it faced off against aggressive Soviet expansionist policies in southern Africa, where armed Marxist movements had seized power in Angola and Mozambique. The Reagan administration adopted a policy of "constructive engagement" with the apartheid regime. It was a policy firmly rejected by the U.S. labor movement.

The issue of what to do about South Africa was complicated by two factors: the divisions within the anti-apartheid movement and the difficulties of the African American Labor Center (AALC) in dealing with the opposition. The dominant political movement in South Africa was the African National Congress (ANC). It brought together the country's progressive political forces and organized broad national opposition campaigns to end apartheid and bring about majority rule. But, with many of its leaders in prison since the early 1960s, the ANC decided to take up armed struggle in exile through its guerilla arm, Umkhonte we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation"). There also arose a parallel civic movement within South Africa made up of student, trade union, political, and other groups. This latter movement declared support for the ANC and the "armed struggle," but saw civic resistance as a better strategy to confront a regime that had overwhelming force. The firmly pro-Soviet Communist Party played a significant role in the ANC. Its leader, Chris Hani, was instrumental in moving the ANC toward armed struggle and headed the Umkhonte we Sizwe. There was another major internal division: that between the ANC, which supported a multiracial democracy, and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), which had an Africanist ideology and was backed by the Black Consciousness student movement.

The AALC and the AFL-CIO adhered to a boycott of South Africa and businesses doing business there, in accordance with the policies of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). But the ANC kept its distance from the AFL-CIO, influenced heavily by the Communist Party. The AALC/AFL-CIO followed a similar course, and also created non-public relationships with the more anti-communist PAC. Meanwhile, the ANC, recognized by most of Africa as a South African government-in-exile, threatened to break the AALC's ties to all African labor movements if it pursued any programs with independent black trade unions inside South Africa, which the ANC saw as a potential threat to its authority. The AALC took this threat seriously. An ANC-inspired labor boycott of AALC would affect programs in a dozen or more countries.

Roy Godson had taken a particular interest in South Africa due to the rise of independent black and multiracial trade unions. The Industrial Conciliation Act placed many restrictions on the ability of blacks to organize unions (it forbade legal registration or bargaining). Nevertheless, independent multiracial unions were

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Herb Magidson, June 16, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Convention Resolutions, 1974-89, Reuther Library, AFT Convention Proceedings.

slowly increasing: in 1978, there were 22 such unions claiming 60,000 members. That year, Godson took David Dorn and Larry Specht from the Labor Desk to investigate the situation on the ground. The three met with a wide range of union leaders and activists, including representatives from a legally registered multiracial union, the National Union of Clothing Workers (NUCW). They also met with leaders of the anti-apartheid movement, including the brother of an imprisoned leader of the Soweto student uprising. Godson returned from South Africa convinced of the potential of an independent union movement. In a paper circulated within policy and labor circles, he argued that a union movement representing even one-sixth of the total black labor force of 10 to 13 million could help bring democratic change to the country. The AFL-CIO, he wrote, should help build such a movement.¹⁵¹

In early 1980, Godson proposed to Shanker that the Labor Desk organize a racially integrated trip to South Africa, comprised of leaders from the AFT and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), the natural counterpart to NUSW. The ILGWU had a long history of international activism dating to its legendary leader, David Dubinsky (president from 1932 to 1966). The internationalist tradition had been passed to Sol Chaikin (president from 1975 to 1986) and Jay Mazur (the head of Local 23-25, ILGWU's largest local, and later Chaikin's successor as national president). Mazur, in fact, was an experienced participant in both Godson's International Labor Program and programs of the AALC, AIFLD, and AAFLI. Among other things, he had participated with Shanker in the Ivory Coast conference of African trade union leaders in 1973.¹⁵²

Godson knew there were potential difficulties with the trip. In general, the AALC objected to affiliates acting on their own, outside AFL-CIO auspices; in the case of South Africa, it objected even more so given the ANC's threat. Dorn supported Godson's proposal and recalls that Shanker "understood the issue quickly." Simply, there was a new opportunity to help change the situation in South Africa. "The European federations were already organizing contacts and programs" and "it would be a big mistake for the American labor movement not to engage with the independent unions."¹⁵³ Shanker agreed to send Dorn, still a staff assistant at the IFFTU, and AFT vice president Herb Magidson; the ILGWU sent Jay Mazur and Joseph Fisher, an ILGWU vice president from Philadelphia who was African-American. Roy Godson and Larry Specht also went from the Labor Desk. As expected, the AALC director, Pat O'Farrell, and AFL-CIO international affairs director, Ernie Lee, objected to the trip and lobbied the newly elected AFL-CIO president, Lane Kirkland, to stop the trip. But Shanker and Chaikin had already convinced Kirkland to regard the trip as a program separate from the AFL-CIO. Kirkland told Lee not to make trouble for him with his two most loyal executive council members on foreign policy.¹⁵⁴

Sending an integrated group was difficult. Under apartheid law, blacks could not stay in the same hotel or eat in the same restaurants as whites. This was unacceptable to the delegation. Once there, however, the South African authorities decided to accommodate the group simply by designating Fisher as an "honorary white" and permitting him to eat and sleep in the same establishments as the white members of the delegation. The solution, while far from optimal, was also necessary for a second trip organized the following year, this time with Dorn going as the AFT's international affairs director along with Nat LaCour, the African-American president of the United Teachers of New Orleans, Antonio Cortese, executive vice president of NYSUT, and Eugenia Kemble (still formally overseeing the department as Shanker's special assistant).¹⁵⁵ For each trip, the delegations had full schedules of meetings with trade unionists (of all types), anti-apartheid activists, opposition political figures,

¹⁵¹ Roy Godson, "Black Labor as a Swing Factor in South Africa's Evolution," International Labor Program Papers, No. 3, ILP, Georgetown University, 1979.

¹⁵² Interviews with Jay Mazur, October 26, 2011, and Roy Godson, November 4, 2011.

¹⁵³ Interview with David Dorn, September 15, 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Also, interviews with Nat LaCour and Antonio Cortese, April 1, 2012.

education leaders, and student activists. One meeting in a shantytown in Soweto shocked Cortese. The poverty was extreme and pervasive. "Abodes weren't even shanties, they were just cardboard."¹⁵⁶

By the second trip, the AALC had stopped opposing the AFT's activities and Eugenia Kemble was asked to brief the AALC on her findings. She reported on the creation of two newly established federations: CUSA (Council of Unions of South Africa), aligned with the Pan-African Congress, and FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions), tied to the ANC.¹⁵⁷ She related their leaders' request for targeted training in union organizing and workplace issues (related to black lung disease, for example) instead of the usual general trade union education over time favored by the AALC. And, as relationships developed, the AALC did indeed change its program model in order to meet the unions' requests. It tended to favor the PAC-affiliated CUSA, but also became an effective partner of FOSATU.

Dorn prepared a memo for the AFT on the situation of South African teachers. He wrote that there was little to work with there. The government had created teacher organizations by race and region. The African Teachers Association of South Africa (ATASA), representing black educators, was dominated by administrators who tended to be compliant, although some regional leaders were less so. A number of teachers who had been energized by the Soweto student uprisings in 1976 and 1978 left the schools to organize a more general protest of the education system. Dorn recommended that AFT encourage the development of any independent teacher organization and union, including some of the less compliant regional organizations of ATASA, as well as civic organizations in the education field.¹⁵⁸

The AFT's anti-apartheid activity was steady. Dorn took nearly 12 trips in the 1980s to develop contacts and relationships, help fledgling unions, and develop assistance and training programs. At each AFT convention, a resolution on South Africa was passed that condemned apartheid, called for disinvestment, and supported independent trade unions. On numerous occasions, Shanker led officers and staff in anti-apartheid protests organized by the AFL-CIO; at some, protesters (including Shanker) were arrested. At the 1986 AFT convention in Chicago, delegates organized a protest outside that city's South African consulate. Afterwards, Shanker delivered copies of more than 2,000 international cables, which delegates had been asked to send to the South African government to protest the repression of free trade unions. During this period, the AFT also hosted several delegations of black South African trade unionists brought to the U.S. on AALC exchanges. In 1986, the AFT backed the creation of Project South Africa at the A. Philip Randolph Institute, an initiative of Bayard Rustin to support civic resistance to apartheid. Shanker encouraged AFT members to work with Project South Africa and support its activities.¹⁵⁹

In South Africa, the situation remained complex. Many groups continued to formally support the ANC, including its strategy of armed struggle, but as the 1980s unfolded, civic forces using more non-violent strategies were gaining strength and helping to bring greater pressure on the regime. The United Democratic Front (UDF), launched on August 20, 1983, brought these civic and political forces together in a multiracial coalition. At the heart of the movement were the independent trade union federations. By 1985, NACTU and COSATU (the renamed PAC- and ANC-affiliated federations) had organized hundreds of thousands of members. Despite arrests, harassment, and the unions' non-legal status, successful protests and strikes had

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Antonio Cortese, April 1, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ The two later renamed themselves after mergers to NACTU (National Council of Trade Unions) and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), respectively.

¹⁵⁸ "Memo to Albert Shanker Re: Trip to South Africa," anonymous memo of the International Affairs Department, Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 5, Folder 18.

¹⁵⁹ "AFT Efforts in Support of Black Trade Unions in South Africa," anonymous memo, Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 5, Folder 18.

resulted in better wages and conditions for black workers. Even the powerful Chamber of Mines recognized COSATU's National Union of Mineworkers as a negotiating partner.

At the same time, several new teacher organizations emerged outside of the racially- organized African Teachers Association. One was the National Education Union of South Africa, or NEUSA. Originally formed in 1980, it emerged as one of the more dynamic organizations in South Africa, along with the University Teachers Association of South Africa (UTASA). Although neither had gained representative status to bargain for teachers, both were playing key policy roles in the education and opposition communities. NEUSA's aim became a common call to arms: "One education system now."

As a result of these developments, by 1988, there was a greater opening for direct programs with teachers. The international affairs department worked with all groups that were independent of government control, including some regional organizations of ATASA. In January, with AALC support, two trainers from the AFT's Union Leadership Institute (ULI) took part in a month-long training-of-trainers program for black trade union leaders conducted in the United States. In April, the AFT conducted follow-up training in Maseru, Lesotho, for representatives of the Natal African Teachers Union. In September, there was further training in Lesotho for black teachers unions.¹⁶⁰

At the same time, the South African government was ratcheting up repression—what turned out to be the last gasp of apartheid. The government adopted regulations that forced university administrations to prevent anti-apartheid protests or expressions of any sort, in the classroom or elsewhere. Seventeen education groups were banned. Under State of Emergency Act regulations, S. Veli Mnyandu, a 27-year-old activist in NEUSA, was placed in indefinite detention without charge. Such indeterminate arrests often meant a death sentence. The IFFTU and AFT launched an international campaign to gain Mnyandu's release. At the AFT, the campaign was the initial action of a new international affairs department initiative called Teachers Under Dictatorship. The TUD's first "AFT Action Bulletin" was sent to leaders and locals throughout the country, asking members to write letters on Mnyandu's behalf to the South African ambassador to the U.S., South Africa president P.W. Botha, and the U.S. Secretary of State. Mnyandu became a cause célèbre and was released within several months.¹⁶¹

As part of the Teachers Under Dictatorship initiative, Shanker agreed to a second campaign to protest new, repressive university regulations. The University Teachers Association of South Africa (UTASA) had appealed to the AFT for help in stopping these restrictions. (A similar campaign had been organized around the suppression of university autonomy in Poland the previous year.) Irwin Polishook, the head of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the AFT's largest higher education local (representing academic personnel at the City University of New York), signed a joint appeal with Shanker to leaders of universities and related organizations, calling on them to join a petition and letter-writing campaign urging South Africa's President Botha, Education Minister F.W. de Klerk, and the South African ambassador to the U.S. to lift the restrictions.¹⁶²

Around the same time, the regime passed legislation banning trade union rights, prompting Shanker to send another protest letter to President Botha and de Klerk, the legislation's promoter. There followed an unusual exchange, two letters each, between Shanker and a leading representative of the South African dictatorship. Usually Shanker received an officious response to his protest letters, if any at all. De Klerk, using unusually polite language, defended the new legislation, emphasizing "that the recent legislation . . . merely provided an unambiguous formulation of the provision which already prevents teachers from forming trade

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Mnyandu had an opportunity to meet many AFT members who acted on his behalf in 1990, when he spoke as one of the democratic heroes honored at the AFT convention in Boston.

¹⁶² "Appeal for Academic Freedom and University Autonomy," AFT Petition, December 21, 1987, Reuther Library, WSU, IAD, Box 51, Folder 20.

unions.” He cited arguments used in the United States that teacher unions are unprofessional and unnecessary. Shanker wrote back:

Contrary to the arguments made against teacher trade unionism, trade unions and collective bargaining have served to enhance the teaching profession, to establish institutional guarantees for the integrity of the profession, and to further the interests of education itself.¹⁶³

De Klerk soon engaged in a more significant and consequential dialogue when he became president in 1989, this time with Nelson Mandela, the acknowledged leader of the anti-apartheid movement. Beginning when Mandela was still in prison, the dialogue continued after de Klerk ordered him freed in 1990 after 29 years’ imprisonment. The two ultimately negotiated the end of apartheid, de Klerk’s withdrawal from power, and free elections in 1994. Mandela won in a landslide. The AFT sent fifteen observers with an AALC delegation to help monitor the first free ballot in South Africa’s history.

Teachers and students were among the most active, dynamic, and effective opponents of apartheid. The AFT and the IFFTU had provided direct support and training to many of them, including several regional associations in ATASA, NEUSA, and UTASA. The last attempts to save apartheid through repressive legislation in 1988 did not stop teachers from coalescing. In April 1988, nine independent teacher unions and associations, including NEUSA and ATASA, met in Harare, Zimbabwe, to form the National Teacher Unity Forum (NTUF) under the sponsorship of the ANC-affiliated COSATU trade union federation. Members of the forum agreed to work towards a national and non-racial teachers’ union. Five more organizations joined the NTUF. In 1990, all the organizations in the forum agreed to establish the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which pledged to work for a “unitary, non-racial and democratic South Africa.”¹⁶⁴ Today, it is the principal teachers union of South Africa.

Shanker and the AFT were at the forefront of supporting independent trade unions in South Africa and helping to encourage the AALC to take a more active approach. Godons’s prediction had proved true: black trade unions representing at least one-sixth of the workforce (in the end it was much more) had been instrumental in ending apartheid and bringing about a democratic transition. Work actions, in addition to protests, had proved decisive. In the education sector, the AFT and IFFTU helped bring about teacher unity and the establishment of one of South Africa’s strongest unions (240,000 members) in the COSATU federation (1.8 million members). Thulas Nexi, SADTU’s general secretary from 1995 to 2011, went on to be elected president of Education International (IEFTU’s successor organization), serving from 2004 to 2009. According to Nexi, the AFT’s work supporting free teachers’ unions in South Africa is “part of SADTU’s story.”¹⁶⁵

Chile

In the mid- to late 1980s, Albert Shanker’s “equal opportunity” opposition to dictatorship had another focus: General Augusto Pinochet’s Chile.

Many “New Left” accounts have distorted the AFL-CIO’s and AFT’s actions and views on Chile. The AFL and AFL-CIO had a long tradition of supporting Chilean trade unions dating to the early part of the century. Yet, according to these accounts, the AFL-CIO was supposed to have colluded with the Nixon administration and the CIA to overthrow Chile’s socialist president, Salvador Allende, to install the brutal, anti-union dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. It made little sense that the AFL-CIO would conspire to

¹⁶³ “Letter to Minister Botha from Albert Shanker Re: Teacher Union Restrictions,” August 4, 1988, Reuther Library, WSU, IAD, Box 51, Folder 20.

¹⁶⁴ “History of South African Democratic Teachers Union,” SADTU web site, <http://www.sadtu.org.za/>.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with David Dorn, May 28, 2012.

suppress Chileans' worker rights, but the distortion was repeated in Left publications, such as *The Nation*, *Village Voice*, *Mother Jones*, and elsewhere. To these publications and groups, Albert Shanker was first and foremost among American labor leaders who were "implicated" in a worldwide, right-wing, CIA-run cabal.

Shanker's single standard for the union's foreign policy diminished the attacks from the Left within the AFT. The AFT's immediate and enduring opposition to Pinochet in Chile was an example of that standard. But the events that laid questions about Shanker's position to rest were the AFT's unwavering support for Chile's independent teachers' union, and its participation in the "No" campaign for the plebiscite that led to Pinochet's downfall.

General Augusto Pinochet installed himself as Chile's leader in a military coup against Salvador Allende's government on September 11, 1973. In the 1970 presidential elections, Allende received a small plurality, but still chose to push forward a controversial and divisive program—the "March to Socialism," he called it—involving nationalization of key industries, land reform, and the redistribution of wealth. A four-week tour of Chile by Fidel Castro in 1971 raised security alarms in the United States. By 1973, the Nixon administration made clear that it tacitly supported a coup (the CIA actively fomented dissent). The Nixon administration, as one observer noted, "did not have a human rights policy."¹⁶⁶

The AFL-CIO, which had worked with Chile's politically-divided labor movement, immediately condemned the Pinochet coup. So did the AFT.¹⁶⁷ As Pinochet consolidated power, he instituted a repressive regime aimed at eliminating Allende's supporters and anyone else who opposed the new dictatorship. In this context, Pinochet banned the ideologically diverse Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (Workers' United Center or CUT). Communist trade union leaders active in CUT left the country and formed a union front in exile that received most of the international labor movement's support. But most trade unionists, including the leaders of the main unions, stayed in Chile and braved the regime's ire. To avoid legal difficulties, they used the generic name, Group of Ten, instead of declaring themselves to be a union federation.

The AFL-CIO steadfastly supported the Group of Ten and took quick action to oppose legislation that further restricted trade union rights. The AFL-CIO also provided financial and material support to the Group of Ten and eventually convinced the ICFTU to switch its support from the exile organization to the Pinochet opponents inside Chile. AFL-CIO vice presidents traveled to Chile to meet with Chile's trade unionists. Teddy Gleason, president of the International Longshoremen's Union, pledged his support to the Chilean dockworkers, one of the stronger unions, by telling his members to refuse to unload ships of Chilean fruit. In 1985, the AFL-CIO submitted a complaint against Chile under the Freedom of Association provisions of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), a system of low tariffs for favored U.S. trading partners. The AFL-CIO won its case, causing Chile to be taken off the GSP list and to lose its tariff preferences—a major victory in the anti-Pinochet struggle.¹⁶⁸

The display of solidarity that Chilean trade unionists appreciated most was when George Meany offered to travel to Chile to meet the Group of Ten, only to refuse when Pinochet made the visit conditional on Meany's meeting the general. In 1977, the Chilean minister of labor wrote Meany that the AFL-CIO shared his government's stand against Marxist-Leninism and its support of "the universal value that human rights should merit." Meany replied:

¹⁶⁶ Henry G. Barnes Jr., "U.S. Human Rights Policies and Chile," *Implementing Human Rights Policy: Agendas, Policies, and Practices*, ed. Debra Liang-Fenton (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2004). Barnes was U.S. Ambassador to Chile from 1985 to 1988.

¹⁶⁷ See Resolutions on Chile, AFL-CIO, GMMA, Publications, 1973-89 and Resolutions of AFT Conventions, 1974-89, Reuther Library, AFT Convention Proceedings.

¹⁶⁸ "Chile and American Labor: September 1973-December 1981," AIFLD paper, 1981, Tamiment, RFW Archives, UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag. 022. Box 35, Folder 10-12.

When your government ceases its persecution of trade union leaders and permits unrestricted trade union organizing, allows free and unsupervised trade union elections to take place . . . and restores the right to collective bargaining, then, and only then, will there be a basis for believing that Chile subscribes to “the universal value that human rights should merit.”¹⁶⁹

In April 1981, the Group of Ten reorganized itself into the Democratic Union of Workers (Unión Democrática de Trabajadores, or UDT), claiming 780,000 members, a significant figure given Pinochet’s repression of independent unions. After several mergers and name changes, the UDT once again became the CUT (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores), symbolically closing the door on the Pinochet period.

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Chile’s education union sector was organized under the Colegio de Profesores (Association of Teachers). It had a long history but fell outside the UDT/CUT—for good reason: starting in 1973, the Colegio had been controlled by the Pinochet regime. Throughout this period, the Colegio was controlled by different political factions. But, in 1985, after a number of tries, a democratic alliance gained control through the election of a Christian Democratic candidate, Osvaldo Verdugo, as general secretary.

Until then, the AFT and IFFTU had contact with a handful of pro-democracy teacher activists, but had no Chilean counterpart to work with. While the Colegio still did not have bargaining rights (mayors, appointed by Pinochet, had total power over teachers), under Verdugo, these democracy activists had reclaimed the organization for their own. In 1987, AIFLD contacted the AFT about these developments within the Colegio and offered a grant of \$70,000 to provide it with assistance. But even before the AFT could contact the Colegio’s leadership, AIFLD retracted the offer; it had learned that Verdugo’s coalition included a Communist Party faction. AIFLD believed a grant to the Colegio violated its policy of non-cooperation with communist unions.¹⁷⁰

International Affairs Director David Dorn, with Shanker’s approval, contacted the Colegio himself, and became convinced that AIFLD’s position was counterproductive to the American labor movement’s goals for democratization. While the Communist Party faction was a member Verdugo’s coalition, the coalition was controlled by a majority of pro-democracy party factions. Verdugo asked the AFT for support to strengthen this group within the Colegio. It was unusual for the AFT to support a particular faction within an organization, but Shanker had agreed to it in a handful of cases where democratic forces needed help to compete against anti-democratic groups. The AFT provided \$70,000 for the internal election, which went mostly towards printing campaign literature. The anti-Pinochet bloc within the Colegio, mostly made up of non-communist groups, won soundly. This relatively small grant had succeeded in reinforcing the Colegio as a democratic organization committed to bringing an end to dictatorship in Chile.¹⁷¹

The opportunity to bring democracy back to Chile was approaching. The Pinochet dictatorship had unwittingly set a time bomb for its own destruction in the Chilean constitution adopted in 1973, which required a plebiscite on Pinochet’s rule after 15 years. The plebiscite was scheduled for the fall of 1988. The opposition was increasingly united and noisy. (This was literally so; recurring Days of Protest brought a cacophony of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with David Dorn, September 15, 2011.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

banging pots and pans to the neighborhoods of Santiago and other large cities.) Even so, Pinochet and the junta were confident they had majority support and that Pinochet's security forces could stifle dissent. Contrary to these expectations, however, various political, trade union, and civic opposition groups coalesced, forming the Commando Por El No. The Colegio de Profesores, with 100,000 members, was a key player in the coalition.

Osvaldo Verdugo was a charismatic leader and became a special object of interest to the regime. After one opposition rally, Verdugo was arrested and held incommunicado. "This was the most dangerous thing, when they arrested you but hid your identity," Dorn relates. Colegio leaders called the AFT for help; Dorn was able to contact someone at the U.S. Embassy, who sent a representative to the jail to ask about Verdugo. "It meant the U.S. was watching." Shortly thereafter, Verdugo was released. "He never forgot that. He believes that saved his life."¹⁷²

Shanker traveled to Chile in 1987 as part of an AIFLD-organized public sector union delegation. The aim of the trip was to increase pressure on Pinochet to respect trade union rights. Shanker's on-the-ground experience gave him both an understanding of the situation and a commitment to do what he could to help those who wanted to end the Pinochet dictatorship. Nearly all Latin American countries had exchanged military dictatorship for democracy. It was time for Chile, too.

The AFT's Teachers Under Dictatorship (TUD) project organized information and solidarity efforts for the "Campaign of the No" in publications and letters to local leaders. Dorn traveled regularly to Chile during this period to strategize with the Colegio and arranged for two AFT vice presidents, NYSUT President Thomas Hobart and UFT President Sandra Feldman, to make trips to show the AFT's solidarity. Whenever Colegio members were persecuted or Colegio rallies broken up by water cannons, Shanker immediately sent off a protest cable to make sure the regime knew that the Colegio had significant support outside Chile.

To enhance support for the Colegio, Shanker invited Verdugo to the 1987 San Francisco Convention to address the delegates and to receive the AFT's Bayard Rustin Human Rights Award (renamed in Rustin's honor after his death earlier in the year). Shanker was aware of Verdugo's reputation for persuasion and wanted him to excite the delegates to action. Verdugo did. Delegates purchased hundreds of "No Mas" (No More) T-shirts and buttons that were made to raise money for the Colegio campaign.

More than anything, the Colegio asked for a large AFT and IFFTU delegation of plebiscite observers to ensure that the vote was free, fair, and not subject to fraud. In August, Shanker wrote to key AFT leaders, urging them to take part in the observer delegation, but at their own, not the national union's, expense. Eighteen leaders received approval from their locals to defray the costs of participating in the one-week trip (many paying out of their own pockets). Shanker had secured approval from the AFL-CIO to solicit participants from other AFL-CIO unions and directed Fred Van Leeuwen to recruit additional observers from the IFTTU. As head of the AFT delegation, Shanker appointed Cincinnati Federation of Teachers president Tom Mooney, a sometime critic of the union's and Shanker's foreign policy. In so doing, Shanker showed the complete unity of the leadership on this issue. Altogether, union observers ended up forming 10 percent of the total international observer team. The AFL-CIO sent a total delegation of 45 observers; the IFFTU sent 31. Teacher unionists comprised the highest proportion of the labor delegation.¹⁷³

As the date of the plebiscite approached, the tension in Chile increased. Huge, dueling rallies were held favoring and opposing the junta. The plebiscite, however, was conducted without violence and, in the end, the vote was not even close: 57 percent to 43 percent in favor of the "No." Under Pinochet's own constitution, the

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Herb Magidson, "Report on the AFT Observers Delegation to Chile: October 1-8, 1988," Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 24.

"No" vote meant the regime had to hold a free, contested presidential election. The next year, Pinochet lost that election against the candidate of a broad democratic coalition.

AFT and IFFTU observers witnessed sporadic cases of fraud and manipulation at local voting sites, but in general even pro-Yes electoral officials were eager to show the international observers that they were following the procedures for ensuring a fair ballot.¹⁷⁴ Mooney, while he remained independent, returned from Chile softened in his attitude. He strongly supported the involvement of Shanker and the AFT in Chile and generally in international affairs. AFT observers reported on the process to the media and members back home. "It was a day of exuberance," wrote AFT vice president Thomas Hobart in the NYSUT newspaper; fellow AFT vice president Paul Cole called it "a magnificent example of where international labor solidarity was used to promote and advance democracy and human rights." Herb Magidson noted that "We can take pride in knowing that the AFT's participation is part of a larger commitment . . . in keeping with the AFT's larger pledge, 'Democracy in Education, Education for Democracy.'"¹⁷⁵

Poland

Shanker took an interest in various dissident movements in Eastern Europe and met often with representatives from Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Polish opposition and human rights groups. As noted earlier, Mihajlo Mihajlov, the Yugoslav dissident forced into exile after being imprisoned, spoke to the AFT's executive council meeting in 1978. Shanker later joined the Committee to Aid Democratic Dissidents in Yugoslavia or CADDY at Mihajlov's request. In 1979, the AFT joined the AFL-CIO's campaign on behalf of a Romanian priest who had defended miners who went on strike in Brasov, Romania, and were brutally repressed.

Poland, however, became Shanker's main interest. In 1976, strikes in Ursus and Radom signaled a new form of opposition. The events sparked the creation of the Workers Defense Committee (KOR), a group of intellectuals who aided repressed workers. Two social groups that the regime had kept separated, workers and intellectuals, now had a vehicle for joining together in support of worker rights. Shanker quickly supported a fund appeal for KOR organized by the League for Industrial Democracy (LID).¹⁷⁶

What happened next would surprise the world. In July 1980, Polish workers began a series of strikes to protest food price increases. While communist regimes in Eastern Europe had effectively repressed similar worker protests before (Polish workers alone had organized strikes in 1956, 1970, and 1976), these strikes kept growing. On August 14, 1980, the dismissal of a crane operator, Anna Walentynowicz, at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk provided the spark for a general strike that spread so quickly throughout Poland that it could not easily be isolated or suppressed.

An inter-factory strike committee was formed to represent the striking workers, by now numbering in the millions. An electrician named Lech Walesa, a colleague of Walentynowicz in a small underground trade union, inspired the shipyard workers to such a degree that they named him chairman of the inter-factory strike committee. After enormous tension, threats, and bluster over many days, the government and the strike committee signed an historic agreement, the Gdansk Accords. Inspired by the International Labor Organization's Conventions No. 87 and No. 98, members of the inter-factory strike committee insisted that the

¹⁷⁴ "IFFTU Report on Chilean Presidential Plebiscite," Press Release, October 6, 1988, FES; Herbert Magidson, "Report of the Observer Delegation to Chile," Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 24.

¹⁷⁵ Press Clippings Packet, AFT Chile Election Observer Team, Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 24 and Magidson, "Report of the Observer Delegation to Chile."

¹⁷⁶ KOR Documents, Tamiment Library, RFW Archives UFT Records: President Shanker, Wag.022, Box 81, Folders 11.

first of the twenty-one accords guarantee the right to organize free trade unions and to strike. As a result, the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ Solidarność) was formally established on September 17, 1980. In the greatest trade union organizing drive in history, 10 million workers signed up by the end of September. Millions more farmers (Rural Solidarity), students (Independent Student Association), and intellectuals organized their own unions.¹⁷⁷

The significance was not lost on Shanker, who wrote in his 1980 Labor Day column, “According to Marxist theory, workers are supposed to revolt against their oppressors in capitalist countries, but in Poland we have the very first revolution in the world conducted by the working class directed not against a capitalist system—but against a communist dictatorship which claims to be a ‘workers’ state.”¹⁷⁸

The significance was also not lost on the AFL-CIO. On September 4, it established a Polish Workers Aid Fund to provide assistance to the new union. Tom Kahn, Lane Kirkland’s special assistant for foreign affairs and a long-time friend and political colleague of Shanker’s, was tasked with coordinating the fund and all Polish-related activities.¹⁷⁹

Within two months the fund had raised \$250,000 from AFL-CIO affiliates and individual contributions. The AFT provided \$10,000, one of the largest donations, as an initial contribution.¹⁸⁰

For Shanker and Kirkland, Solidarity represented the clearest affirmation of their core belief in freedom of association. It also represented confirmation of their anti-communism: that being pro-worker and progressive required active opposition to communism. They believed the emergence of Solidarity should cause liberal soft-liners, advocates of anti-anti-communism as opposed to anti-communism, to rethink their positions. As a corollary, they hoped Solidarity might also cause anti-communist conservatives to gain an appreciation of the role of free trade unions as essential institutions in a democracy.¹⁸¹ Shanker wrote:

The basic struggle is for human rights and the major issue is whether the Polish workers will be permitted to have free trade unions. . . . Millions of Americans who have generally been hostile to trade unions can clearly see in this struggle in Poland what they have not always been able to see in their own backyard: that a union gives workers dignity and that a union is not just a vehicle allowing a worker to win one benefit or another but, rather, a permanent instrument enabling him to fight for his rights without fear of punishment or reprisal.¹⁸²

The two labor leaders were not surprised to find neither expectation fulfilled. The Carter administration’s first response to Solidarity was to heavily lobby Lane Kirkland and the AFL-CIO *not* to help the Polish union. On the other hand, one of Ronald Reagan’s first acts as president, in response to a strike, was to destroy the air traffic controllers’ union, PATCO—which ushered in a new anti-union era in which the U.S. government could no longer be counted on to protect workers’ right to free association against the hostile actions of business.

Neither Kirkland nor Shanker succumbed to President Carter’s anti-Solidarity lobbying, premised on the idea that helping the Polish union would provoke a Soviet invasion. The AFL-CIO supported the Polish union

¹⁷⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New York: Scribner, 1983).

¹⁷⁸ “Strike in Poland: A Labor Day Sermon,” WWS, August 31, 1980.

¹⁷⁹ AFL-CIO Press Release, September 4, 1980, Publications Series, GMMMA.

¹⁸⁰ Letter of Robert Porter to Thomas R. Donahue, Reuther Library, AFT Collection: Office of the Secretary Treasurer: Robert Porter.

¹⁸¹ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 257.

¹⁸² “Strike in Poland,” WWS, August 31, 1980.

fully and at all levels, Kirkland asserted: "Our independent policies, positions, and practices are the essence of free trade unionism."¹⁸³

The 16 months of Solidarity's legal existence in 1980-81 was a time of constant tension and great renewal for Polish society. In the face of the government's repeated attempts to undermine, threaten, and intimidate Solidarity, including joint Polish and Soviet troop movements, Polish society maintained its resolve and organized itself freely. Polish workers used frequent strikes in order to force the government to adhere to the Gdansk Agreements.

The AFL-CIO sent considerable assistance to the Polish union—all according to Solidarity's wishes and instructions. Some of this was sent through the ICFTU as a gesture of cooperation by the newly-re-affiliated AFL-CIO.¹⁸⁴ (Meany had disaffiliated the federation from the ICFTU over a number of issues, including disagreement with affiliates that recognized Soviet bloc trade unions, and weakened support for Israel. The federation also objected to the ICFTU's attempt to get the UAW, which was then outside the AFL-CIO, to join the international organization separately. The AFL-CIO re-affiliated in 1982, in part due to the ICFTU's positive response to the rise of Solidarity.)

The AFL-CIO and AFT also provided a steady diet of information about the Solidarity movement to their leaders and members and had a continuous fundraising campaign at union events, selling T-shirts, buttons, and posters with the distinctive *Solidarność* lettering. (More than \$75,000 was raised in this manner by Frontlash, the youth arm of the AFL-CIO, and the Polish Workers Task Force, a coalition of youth groups established by the Young Social Democrats.¹⁸⁵) The federation also maintained vigil. In December 1980, the AFL-CIO organized demonstrations in several cities, the largest being in New York, to protest Soviet invasion threats. The AFT and UFT mobilized a large number of members to attend. Shanker joined the New York demonstration outside the Soviet Union's U.N. consulate.

In late September 1981, Solidarity wanted to launch an information office in New York around its First Congress. Tom Kahn asked Shanker to provide help. Shanker provided office space, a large financial contribution, and the union's press office and expertise. The Soviets carried out a considerable propaganda campaign about the office, charging that Shanker was a CIA agent at the center of a plot to destabilize the Polish People's Republic by "supporting the distribution of information about Solidarity." Large "exposés" were published in Soviet newspapers and broadcast on Radio Moscow purporting to detail (without any facts) the history of Shanker's CIA-directed anti-Sovietism dating to 1974 and his "funneling \$100,000" to Solidarity through the information office. Shanker did not rebut charges that he was anti-Soviet, but he thoroughly rebuffed the CIA accusation by detailing the AFT's open sources of funding for its international activities. Anyone who believed he was a CIA agent or was funneling CIA funds to Solidarity "could also believe in the tooth fairy," he said. Certainly, he wrote, no one serious could believe the CIA to be capable of organizing a 10-million member mass movement of workers.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ "Remarks of Lane Kirkland to the General Council of the AFL-CIO on the Polish Workers Aid Fund," News Release, Sept. 4, 1980, Publications, GMMA.

¹⁸⁴ 184. Letter to Otto Kersten from Lane Kirkland, July 1981, Unprocessed files, Papers of Lane Kirkland, GMMA, as well as other correspondence in Kirkland's and Kahn's papers (including in processed IAD files).

¹⁸⁵ Boxes 31-34, International Affairs Department, unprocessed collection, GMMA. A collection of folders includes all correspondence and receipts for contributions for the PWAf.

¹⁸⁶ Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 254-55; also, "Solidarity Embarrasses Moscow: Soviets Seek Non-Polish Scapegoat," WWS, October 4, 1981, WWS, October 4, 1980.

The situation in Poland grew more tense. Kahn and Kirkland tried to convince the U.S. government to devise a new carrot-and-stick policy: enticements to forestall a crackdown and threats of full sanctions against Poland and the entire Soviet bloc if there were a crackdown.¹⁸⁷

On the night of December 12-13, 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed martial law (constitutionally he declared a “state of war” on the Polish nation). Carrying out detailed plans prepared over 16 months, the regime’s security forces arrested tens of thousands of union leaders and activists within a day. Dozens of strikes were violently broken (resulting in more than one hundred people killed). A black curtain of repression descended on Poland. The aim of martial law, it was clear, was nothing short of the full destruction of Solidarity.

The Reagan administration was informed of plans for martial law by Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski, a Polish agent inside the general chiefs of staff planning the crackdown. Oddly, though, the administration and Reagan himself were caught “flat-footed” (in the words of Secretary of State Alexander Haig).¹⁸⁸ The State Department even expressed relief that martial law had been imposed by the Polish government instead of by a Soviet invasion. The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski called this the “I would be a milder hangman” argument.¹⁸⁹

The Reagan administration offered no strong U.S. government condemnation of martial law until December 27, fully two weeks after the crackdown began, and even then there was only suspension of a \$100 million credit (for chicken farming) and sanctions placed on Poland’s fishing, air rights, and, to a limited extent, trade. There were no sanctions against the Soviet Union or the Soviet bloc, no full suspension of credits, and no calling in of the Polish debt, which was already well overdue. All of these things, which Lane Kirkland had proposed as policy options in the event of martial law, were ignored.

Shanker was stunned by the administration’s tepid response. He used the full resources of the AFT’s pulpit—his paid “Where We Stand” column in the Sunday *New York Times*, AFT publications, cables to U.S. administration officials, and letters to AFT leaders and associated organizations—to mobilize pressure on the Reagan administration to take a stronger stance and to push for an end to martial law. On December 17, Shanker sent a cable to President Reagan, with copies to 17 top officials:

I am deeply disappointed in the failure of this Administration to speak out clearly against martial law in Poland. While the leaders of Solidarity are arrested, troops are mobilized, and communications are closed off, the United States can only muster careful and hesitant “concern.” Why are we continuing to cow submissively before the self-righteous and false Soviet claims that what is happening in Poland is really strictly a matter of that sorry country’s internal affairs? Can we say nothing about the Soviet troops inside Poland, the Warsaw Pact [forces] based at the border, or . . . the virulent threats made against Solidarity in the Soviet press? . . . What good can come of an American policy that rests on the morally bankrupt distinction between “internal” and “external” when the destruction of civil liberties is

¹⁸⁷ See “AFL-CIO Support for Solidarity” by Eric Chenoweth, published in *The AFL-CIO Confronts the World: The International History of U.S. Labor During the Cold War*, Edited by Robert Anthony Waters, Jr. and Geert van Goethem (publisher to be determined: 2013).

¹⁸⁸ Douglas J. MacEachin, *U.S. Intelligence and the Confrontation in Poland, 1980-81* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002). See especially 211-34.

¹⁸⁹ “Poland: ‘I Would Be a Milder Hangman,’” by Leszek Kolakowski, *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 1981. “It is an irrefutable argument” he noted, “because you never know the absolute hangman.”

at stake. . . . I urge you to support the demands of Solidarity for the freeing of all those arrested and the lifting of martial law. The United States, as leader of the free world, must say at least this much.¹⁹⁰

In his weekly column on December 20, he wrote, "If Jimmy Carter had been re-elected and acted the same way Ronald Reagan has been acting, Ronald Reagan would [have been] jumping all over him and so would a lot of other Americans." He continued, "There are many things to do and there is certainly plenty to say [beyond] 'we view the situation in Poland in the gravest terms.'"¹⁹¹ The following week, in a second column on martial law, he wrote:

So far, the United States has done little more than express sympathy and threaten to take diplomatic and economic action unless martial law is eased—not ended, but eased. With this formulation, President Reagan can let the Polish military junta and the Soviet Union off the hook if some curfew and travel restrictions are eased, or if the Red Cross is allowed to visit Walesa—even though there are no basic changes. It is a weak position.

Shanker pivoted to the public and his members:

[E]ven with President Reagan taking no action, there's still much that we can do as individuals. There should be regular picket lines at each Polish and Soviet Consulate. . . . There should be rallies on college campuses, sermons in churches. The Soviet Union doesn't care too much about world opinion, but sometimes it can be moved.¹⁹²

Shanker argued that the power of solidarity could turn world opinion and policy towards respect for worker rights. He provided detailed information for writing letters, demonstrating, signing the AFL-CIO's petition campaign, joining an international day of solidarity with Solidarity, and buying Solidarity materials from the Polish Workers Task Force.

Shanker's next actions—and those over the next several years—showed a keen understanding for how an overall campaign to defend and support Solidarity could positively affect the situation in Poland in favor of Solidarity. At the same time, he knew that ongoing actions against repression in Poland would be a means to educate members, build leadership, and unite the AFT around its international affairs program. He sent a series of "Dear Local Leader" letters—which did not commonly deal with international affairs—describing what the more than 2,000 local unions of the AFT could (and should) do. The initial letters encouraged participation in the AFL-CIO's weekly rallies and, on January 31, 1982, the international day of solidarity with Solidarity organized by the ICFTU. Shanker himself spoke at the first mass demonstration organized in New York on December 20, outside the Polish consulate (with Mayor Ed Koch, Senator Pat Moynihan, and an array of labor and political leaders). The "local leader" letters also encouraged writing letters, making contributions to the AFL-CIO's Polish Workers Aid Fund, and disseminating information about the continuing struggle of Solidarity underground.

Shanker provided the first union contributions to the Committee in Support of Solidarity, an independent group based in New York City and made up of Solidarity members in exile, Polish Americans, students, and U.S. trade unionists and social democrats. Led by Irena Lasota, a charismatic former political prisoner from Poland and an activist in exile in Poland's democracy movement, the committee quickly became the key American organization providing information on human and worker rights violations under the martial law regime and on Solidarity's efforts to organize underground. The committee was also a key advisor to the

¹⁹⁰ Cable to President Reagan, December 17, 1981, Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 52, Files 44-45.

¹⁹¹ "World Watching Poland . . . And Reagan," WWS, December 20, 1981

¹⁹² "Outcry Needed for Walesa, Solidarity," WWS, December 27, 1981.

AFL-CIO and its constituent unions, including the AFT.¹⁹³ Shanker became a stalwart supporter, helping raise funds for the organization among other unions and within the AFT. Together with UFT President Sandra Feldman, who played an active role, Shanker encouraged the UFT's participation in ongoing demonstrations organized by the committee on anniversaries related to Solidarity and the imposition of martial law, including annual public readings of the list of more than 1,200 political prisoners compiled by the committee (Feldman and Shanker both took part). While active support for such protest activities understandably waned over time, "We could always count on the UFT," said Lasota.¹⁹⁴

In 1983, the Committee in Support of Solidarity solicited the AFT and other unions for support in a campaign to adopt the families of Polish political prisoners, helping them survive martial law. It was a humanitarian effort and also a crucial means to assure imprisoned Solidarity activists that, if they were arrested, their families would be taken care of. The AFT and other unions responded with much needed contributions. Shanker went beyond a simple contribution. He asked AFT locals to adopt families, including taking on the responsibility of getting the money and other support to them. Several dozen locals responded.

To Lasota, however, Shanker's key contribution to the campaign for Solidarity was the understanding he brought to the events in Poland. "I remember Al on television in interviews and at speaking events," she said. "They showed his true concern and he was using the right language explaining the true meaning or essence of Solidarity."¹⁹⁵

In 1988, more than six years after martial law was imposed, most observers had written Solidarity off, believing that it had been defeated. The U.S. government was willing to lift all sanctions without consideration of Solidarity's re-legalization; in fact, this had been the case as early as July 1983. Since that time, the AFL-CIO had waged a constant battle to maintain the original demands for lifting sanctions in force: relegalization of Solidarity, removing legislation that incorporated martial law decrees, and the release of all political prisoners.

Shanker was convinced by a number of sources—the AFL-CIO, the AFT's international affairs department, the Committee in Support of Solidarity, meetings with opposition activists from Poland able to travel to the U.S., and media reports—that the Solidarity movement had survived underground and needed concrete support, encouragement, and international solidarity more than ever. Among other initiatives, Shanker supported the idea of an IFFTU delegation to Poland to meet with Solidarity's teacher representatives. He sent a newly hired staff person, Eric Chenoweth, whose time was divided between work for the AFT and the Committee in Support of Solidarity, to help organize the mission. What the delegation found was an undefeated Solidarity movement and a highly creative "education underground" movement allied with Solidarity.

Two months later, Shanker was able to determine the strength of Solidarity on his own.

Marek Edelman, the only surviving leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization that had led the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a rare Jewish Holocaust survivor who had stayed in Poland, convinced Solidarity leaders to organize a commemoration of the Uprising on its 45th anniversary. He also got Solidarity's support for a privately organized ceremony honoring Wiktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, two leaders of the Jewish General Workers Union (the Bund), who had been assassinated by Stalin's NKVD after fleeing Hitler's invading army. Their bodies were never found. Alter and Ehrlich were worker heroes long forgotten in Poland. Not only had the Nazis destroyed Poland's rich tradition of Jewish life, but also the communist government had wiped out the memory of the democratic socialist movements that had existed before the war. Solidarity wanted an end to this intolerance. Placing two headstones for the Bund leaders at the Jewish cemetery had symbolic

¹⁹³ The author served as director of the Committee in Support of Solidarity and later as co-director of its successor organization, the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Irena Lasota, June 8, 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

meaning on many levels, both as a symbolic recognition of the place of the Bund in pre-war Poland and its leaders' sacrifice at the hands of Stalin.

The organizing committee invited Lane Kirkland to attend. Although he wanted to, he could not. He would have had to go in his official capacity as president of the AFL-CIO, and the Polish authorities would not grant him a visa unless he met officially with the re-created government-controlled, official trade unions. This, of course, he could not do.¹⁹⁶ Shanker, however, convinced Kirkland to let him try to go in an unofficial capacity and convey the AFL-CIO's message of support. Alternate private invitations from Poles were arranged and Shanker obtained a tourist visa. For whatever reason, there was no official intervention limiting his travel. The trip was unusual in all aspects. It was Shanker's first time traveling in Eastern Europe in any capacity and the first time a vice president of the AFL-CIO had traveled to communist Eastern Europe while upholding the AFL-CIO's no-contacts policy (or not violating this policy, as had the leaders of a handful of AFL-CIO affiliates).

Shanker met with a broad range of Solidarity leaders and activists, nearly all of whom were now aboveground (released from jail or returned to home from their hiding places). His first hosts were Romand Zimand, an historian and opposition theorist, and Barbara Stanosz, a philosophy professor and expert on the logician Willard van Orman Quine. They helped coordinate independent academic and university initiatives. Shanker went on to meet with the opposition intellectuals Adam Michnik and Bronislaw Geremek and several former leaders of underground Solidarity now out from hiding, one of whom, Wiktor Kulerski, led the underground education union.

On April 17, Shanker participated in the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in an illegal march of 6,000 Solidarity activists that the authorities did not interrupt. The size of the rally showed not only the strength of the union but also the feeling within the union about the importance of remembering Poland's past. The crowded event at the Jewish cemetery had 2,000 participants. After speeches by Edelman and Warsaw Solidarity leader Zbigniew Bujak, Shanker spoke:

Marek Edelman has called for this symbolic Memorial . . . to "testify to the solidarity of all union members and workers fighting for their rights and freedom." It is for their rights and freedom that Poland's workers today still struggle and I am here to extend that solidarity of all American workers. The AFL-CIO has been constant in its support of your struggle, and of the free trade union Solidarity, which today carries on the torch of freedom once held high by Wiktor Alter and Henryk Erlich. In honoring these two men, here, we give them at long last their proper place.¹⁹⁷

Shanker returned from Poland with a renewed commitment to doing what he could to support the union. In an opinion piece called "Between Defeat and Victory," he wrote:

Polish workers have shown that Solidarity is not dead and the basic human desire for freedom of association—the right to band together to defend one's interests—remains a powerful impulse that the Polish government rejects at its peril. . . Polish workers have tested perestroika and found it wanting. What is needed is a broad policy that helps those who want to achieve real reform and that does not help the current regimes to survive in their efforts to avoid real reform.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ The AFL had strong relations with the Bund, and AFL President William Green took a strong interest in the fate of Alter and Ehrlich. At a memorial service after their assassination, Green said, "When the time comes, when victory is won, we will move heaven and earth to expose the hidden facts of their deaths, to clear their names, and to give them their rightful place in history as heroic martyrs in the cause of progress." Statement from a speech of Albert Shanker at the Memorial for Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich.

¹⁹⁷ "Statement of Albert Shanker at the Memorial to Viktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich," April 17, 1988, Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 63, File 19.

¹⁹⁸ Albert Shanker, "Between Victory and Defeat," Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 57, File 19.

After his trip, Shanker put the AFT international affairs department on full throttle to develop programs to help Solidarity and its education sector.

In August 1988, Shanker had a second opportunity to travel to Poland. On this occasion, he was invited to attend another extraordinary event, the first International Human Rights Conference, a major gathering of human rights and opposition activists from Eastern Europe organized by Zbigniew and Zofia Romaszewski.

The Romaszewskis had the idea to invite human rights activists from all over Eastern Europe and from the West for a single cross-border gathering that would test the Polish government's tolerance of cross-border human rights networking. The Romaszewskis had been active in human rights work dating to the 1960s. They were the first to organize assistance to defend repressed workers in Radom and Ursus in 1976 as part of the Workers Defense Committee (KOR). They headed KOR's Intervention Bureau, which defended human and worker rights activists from repression. During the period when Solidarity was legal, they directed the union's Intervention and Lawfulness Commission. After December 1981, they were imprisoned for two years for organizing the legendary "Radio Solidarność." When they were released, they resumed clandestine leadership of Solidarity's Intervention and Lawfulness Commission, which organized assistance for political prisoners and their families and legal defense for all forms of repression. The Romaszewskis' idea for the conference was to bring as many activists from Eastern European countries as they could all together at the Mistrzejowice Church in Nowa Huta, outside Krakow. The site was purposeful. Nowa Huta was built as a model atheist socialist city around a giant steelworks—a proletarian city that in the view of communist authorities did not need a church. Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, had championed the church building in Mistrzejowice in response to longstanding appeals from workers. It would be a difficult place for police to intrude.¹⁹⁹

The Romaszewskis were very aware of the significant support Shanker had provided (including not just local union sponsorships of prisoners' families but also a \$10,000 contribution).²⁰⁰ Zofia Romaszewska had met Shanker on a trip to the U.S. organized by the Committee in Support of Solidarity. Shanker received AFL-CIO approval to attend the 1988 event on the same basis as his first trip, an unofficial tourist visa, with the understanding that he would convey the AFL-CIO's message of support to the conference. This time, Shanker asked UFT president Sandra Feldman, Adam Urbanski, a Polish immigrant and president of the Rochester Federation of Teachers, and Bruce Miller, the AFT's general counsel, to join him.

The event occurred during a formidable heat wave. Hundreds of human rights and democracy activists from dozens of countries and republics of the Soviet bloc, joined by a large number of Western supporters, were crammed into small surroundings without air conditioning. Notwithstanding the conditions, it was a heady event for Shanker, the life-long anti-communist. It was for everyone there. There had never before been such a gathering of dissidents, oppositionists, human rights activists, and representatives of repressed nationalities and minorities from Soviet bloc countries. Despite attempts at intimidation, in the end the government decided it was better to let the event go off than to repress it, perhaps because of the number of Western notables, such as Shanker, who attended.

Shanker spoke to the plenary and delivered greetings from the AFL-CIO, but his real task was to run a workshop on education (Feldman ran a second one). Shanker was asked to address the topic of "Education and the Limits of Government Control." He acknowledged the difficulties that the idea of state education posed for a society rebelling against an all-powerful state. "Education," he noted, "is alone among the natural activities of government—of whatever variety—that sets out to mold and form the minds and social behavior of a country's people." Shanker argued, however, that schools in a democracy *should* teach what it means to be a citizen in a democracy, but only if instruction were based on principles of free inquiry. Teaching based on free inquiry had a different purpose than education in dictatorships, he said. Dictatorships indoctrinate citizens to serve the state

¹⁹⁹ Eric Chenoweth, "Democracy Aborning," *Freedom at Issue*, Sept.-Oct. 1988.

²⁰⁰ Committee in Support of Solidarity, Unprocessed Records, Private Collection, IDEE.

and to perpetuate tyranny—something that citizens rebel against. He then quoted the philosopher John Dewey, “the first member of the American Federation of Teachers,” to describe the role of teachers and their unions in fostering free thought in education:

[Teacher unions] defend all the interests that teachers have in common and, in representing them, ... represent also the protection of the children against all of the outside interests, economic and political, that would exploit the schools for their own ends, and in doing so, reduce the teaching body to a condition of intellectual vassalage.²⁰¹

The Romaszewskis organized a trip of the participants to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the main Nazi concentration and forced labor camps of the Holocaust, where between 1.25 and 2.5 million people perished, 90 percent of them Jews. The thought was that if anyone were to remember these monstrous human rights crimes of a totalitarian state, it should be the participants of this conference. The Romaszewskis asked Shanker to read the Mourners’ Kadish at the site of the Birkenau extermination camp.

The International Human Rights Conference was historic in its own right, helping to inspire and spread the wave of pro-democracy activism throughout the region. It also took place at an historic moment. As the conference was about to begin, mass strikes began again at Poland’s industrial strongholds, including the Silesian mines and the Gdansk shipyard. The conference proved fortuitous in at least one respect; John Vanderveken, the general secretary of the ICFTU, had come to speak to participants. Quickly after finishing his remarks, he sped to the sites of the strikes at the invitation of the strikers, first to the mines and then to Gdansk, in order to facilitate negotiations. The workers’ main demand: the restoration of Solidarity. After two weeks of united worker action, the government agreed to roundtable talks with Solidarity, tacitly recognizing its continued existence.

Eastern Europe

Even before his first trip to Poland, Shanker asked the AFT International Affairs Department to explore possibilities for work in other Eastern European countries. AFT staff traveled to Hungary to meet the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers, the Democratic Teachers Union, and a new federation, the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions. The AFT followed up by sending representatives to each of these organizations’ first congresses in 1988, which was noted appreciatively by Pal Forgacs, the head of the Scientific Workers union.²⁰² In April 1988, staff went to Czechoslovakia and met with several leading figures of Charter 77, the main dissident group, some of whose members were former teachers who had been dismissed for their views.

Based on the contacts made on that earlier trip, the AFT’s delegates to the International Human Rights Conference traveled next to Prague. Conditions were not as free as in Poland. While the group was not threatened directly, the level of fear was high and police, both uniformed and non-uniformed, were omnipresent. A few days before the AFT delegation’s arrival, a student demonstration organized by the John Lennon Peace Society had been dealt with violently by police.

There was no place to meet, not even a restaurant, without being observed. The group traveled from apartment to apartment to meet Charter 77 representatives, independent cultural figures, and distributors of independent cultural publications. In one meeting, with Jan Urban, a handsome and articulate spokesman for

²⁰¹ Speech to the International Human Rights Conference, August 1988, Reuther Library, Office of the President: Albert Shanker, Box 63, File 66.

²⁰² Letter from Pal Forgacs to Albert Shanker, Reuther Library, Office of the President: Albert Shanker, Box 52, File 40.

Charter 77, it emerged that he had been a teacher but was fired for refusing to sign a denunciation of the Solidarity trade union. He signed Charter 77 instead and could thereafter make a living only as a laborer doing construction work. He was able to provide information about other teachers dismissed for their views. They were publicized in an “Action Bulletin” that asked AFT members to send letters demanding the teachers’ reinstatement. Throughout, the activists expressed great appreciation that Albert Shanker and his companions had come to visit. It was rare for such a delegation to visit a closed country such as Czechoslovakia. The activists asked that more people come in order to break their isolation from the West.

After the delegation returned, events in Eastern Europe moved swiftly. In the Soviet Union, President Gorbachev created a new legislative body, the Congress of People’s Deputies. While most seats would be held by Communist Party candidates, a complicated system allowed some contested seats. In elections held in March 1989, 300 independent candidates won seats. Shanker’s human rights hero, Andrei Sakharov, became the leader of the opposition bloc.

In Poland, after the August 1988 strikes, the government initially maneuvered to delay the roundtable talks they had agreed to, but finally sat down to negotiate in March 1989. The negotiations were controversial within Solidarity—some feared that too much compromise was built into the talks. In the end, the government agreed to re-legalize Solidarity (the essential demand), to allow an uncensored Solidarity newspaper, and, like in the Soviet Union, to hold pseudo-free elections. In Poland’s case, one-third of the seats in the Sejm, or Parliament, would be freely contested, along with all 100 seats of a newly created Senate that had few powers. On election day, June 4, 1989, the candidates representing Solidarity won every contested seat for both the Sejm and the Senate by landslide proportions. Many uncontested seats, however, had to have a second round for lack of votes. It was a resounding defeat for the Polish United Workers (Communist) Party and ultimately caused the fall of the regime. By September, a Solidarity government was in power.

With the events of 1989, Shanker felt vindicated in his belief in the power of democracy to triumph over tyranny, even against the odds. Right after the Polish elections, Shanker wrote:

The recent elections in the USSR and Poland show that if the peoples of those countries are given a choice they make the same choices we do. They not only elected nearly all the candidates who stood for pluralism and democracy, but . . . they also defeated a large number of the candidates who ran without opposition.²⁰³

In a video introduction to the international affairs program at the 1990 AFT convention in Boston, he said:

Ultimately, what won here was very fascinating. It was the sheer morality of what [the dissidents] stood for against the dictators who no longer believed in what they stood for. Here you had all the guns, and all the bombs, and all the tanks, and there you had a lot of unarmed people. And those with all the arms surrendered. That’s a miracle.

Shanker and the AFT international affairs department had organized activities in Eastern Europe well before the revolutions of 1989. From the very beginning of his AFT presidency, Shanker stressed the importance of helping pro-democracy dissidents in communist countries and predicted that in the future “freedom would become general” in the communist world. Shanker did not allow this interest to fade. He continued his own and the AFT’s activities well after the initial excitement of communism’s fall. Indeed, many dozens of national organizers and other local, state, and national AFT staff took part in training programs over many years, working with independent teacher organizations in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Kosova, Lithuania, Russia, and Georgia (see also Chapter 10).

²⁰³ “East Teaches West,” WWS, June 11, 1989.

In 1990 at the Boston convention, Shanker received a mandate for this continued activity. He had just returned from participating in international monitoring of general elections in Czechoslovakia, the first such elections since communism had been imposed in the late 1940s. Jan Urban, the dissident he met in August 1988, was the campaign manager for the victorious democratic coalition, Civic Forum, which had been established following the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Wishing to share and spread his excitement at democratic developments with which the AFT was involved, Shanker invited key figures from the democracy and teacher union movements in Eastern Europe, Chile, South Africa, and China to attend and speak at the convention. The international affairs program included Fred Van Leeuwen, Osvaldo Verdugo, the South African teacher unionist S. Veli Mnyandu, the Polish education leader Wiktor Kulerski, and Jan Urban. More than a dozen other international guests attended. A video describing the AFT's international assistance program to teacher and democracy movements generated enthusiastic support from the delegates. In conclusion, Shanker thanked the delegates for their continuing support of the international affairs work of the AFT, which, he noted, was one of the few unions to carry out such work in the AFL-CIO.

Six educators from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria who attended the convention then traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the launching of a new project, Education for Democracy/International (see below), and to meet with administration officials, members of Congress, and education organizations to encourage better coordination of U.S. support for civic education and democracy in Eastern Europe. Assisted by AFT staff, the group presented a "7-Point Plan for Program Assistance for Education for Democracy in Eastern Europe" to government officials and members of Congress. The plan met with interest at a dinner Shanker hosted for the Eastern Europeans and Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander and resulted in funding for two American universities (in Bulgaria and Georgia) and a large teacher exchange program. Still, no comprehensive training and education of teachers was envisioned in the plan.

In the summer of 1991, Shanker took a month-long trip with his wife Edith through Eastern Europe, starting on the Dalmatian Coast and continuing through Bosnia, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak Republics. In Hungary, he was joined by Bella Rosenberg, an assistant to the president at the AFT, his former UFT assistant Yetta Barsh, and Walter Naegle, Bayard Rustin's life partner.

In Hungary (Pécs), Slovakia (Bratislava), and Czech Republic (Prague), Shanker took part in large discussions (up to 200 people) with new teacher unionists who were eager to plumb his knowledge and benefit from his experience. The trip ended in Leningrad at the 2nd International Human Rights Conference, again organized by the Romaszewskis. This time, they decided that the conference should take place in the Soviet Union, now the center of the ongoing struggle for democracy, in the wake of the successful 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. In the changing situation of the USSR, Leningrad (soon to have its historical name, St. Petersburg, restored) had semi-democratic elections for mayor. The winner, the reformer Anatoly Sobchak, agreed to host the event. Shanker met there with Penn Kemble, at that time a senior scholar at Freedom House and a member of the conference's working group, Senator Minority Leader Robert Dole (R), and Lane Kirkland, who was able to travel without conditions to visit the fledgling democratic worker movements that were having a significant impact on the situation in the Soviet Union. Shanker ran the workshops on trade unionism and education for democracy activists. While in Leningrad, he and Kirkland took part in a worker protest at the Winter Palace organized by independent trade unions. Afterwards, they traveled to Moscow, where an event was organized with worker representatives from throughout Russia.

Hong Kong and China

Beginning in the 1970s, Shanker had taken a special interest in Hong Kong. As a Crown colony, Hong Kong was under a British administration that allowed limited democratic freedoms. These included freedom of association, but not collective bargaining rights. The labor movement was dominated by unions tied to the Communist Party and the Kuomintang, the Taiwanese Nationalist party that competed with Beijing for

influence. Trade unions independent of party influence represented a smaller percentage of the workforce. Shanker visited their leaders on his early visits to Hong Kong and Asia in the 1970s and he continued these visits until 1984.

One independent union was the Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union (PTU). Shanker had a major impact on its establishment. The union emerged in 1973 out of an unprecedented series of strikes led by a dynamic teacher and principal, Szeto Wah, in response to severe salary cuts. This was a highly unusual spontaneous action by teachers in Asia. Almost thirty years later, at a lecture hosted by the Albert Shanker Institute, Szeto revealed the source of his boldness:

In the Chinese tradition, teaching is regarded as a profession that stands above . . . the normal and legitimate interests of other workers: wages, working conditions, and dignity on the job. Unlike workers of other trades, teachers are not supposed to organize themselves into trade unions. It was the American Federation of Teachers, led by Al, that inspired me to break from this Chinese tradition and to lead Hong Kong teachers on strike in 1973, and following the success of the strikes, to form the Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union (the PTU). Since the day it was established, the PTU has been the strongest trade union in Hong Kong.²⁰⁴

Shanker inspired teacher unions in many places, but in Hong Kong he gave rise to a teacher union movement without having had any personal contact.

A relationship between the PTU and the AFT began in the early 1980s when David Dorn asked an AFT national organizer, John Berg, to stop in Hong Kong after going to service the AFT's local in Guam, a U.S. territory in the South Pacific. Berg found the PTU to be an efficient and professional union, providing medical and dental benefits and featuring other services, such as highly profitable food co-ops, housing, and a whole range of other activities. It was also very active in political life. Dorn followed up Berg's report by visiting Hong Kong himself.²⁰⁵

The 100-year treaty granting Britain control over the port of Hong Kong was set to expire in 1997, with sovereignty returning to the Chinese government. Although known for his pro-democratic views, Szeto Wah was named by the Chinese government to the Drafting Committee for the Basic Law, which would govern Hong Kong after its transfer to Chinese rule. Szeto and Martin Lee, a lawyer, among others, sought to extend the existing democratic rights of British rule. After the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989, in which the army and police killed thousands of demonstrators to crush a national reform movement in China, Szeto, Lee, and other pro-democratic members of the drafting committee spoke out openly against the violence used against unarmed students. Szeto organized the first mass protests in Hong Kong and resigned as PTU president in 1990 to form two political movements, the United Democrats of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. The Chinese government forced Szeto and other democrats off the Drafting Committee.

The AFT launched a number of protest actions after the Tiananmen Square massacre, in consultation with Szeto Wah and the PTU. Shanker sent letters to Chinese authorities and urged AFT locals nationwide to organize letter writing campaigns. The AFT executive council issued a statement calling for the suspension of all trade agreements with the People's Republic of China. The AFT gave financial and other support to Szeto's Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. It also backed the PTU's new

²⁰⁴ Szeto Wah, Inaugural Lecture, Albert Shanker Lecture Series, May 15, 2002. Available from the Albert Shanker Institute.

²⁰⁵ Interview with David Dorn, September 15, 2011.

application for membership in the IFFTU. (Before the Tiananmen massacre, PTU members had not been convinced of the necessity of joining an international organization).²⁰⁶

As the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong approached, Shanker was persistent in his concern for the fate of Hong Kong and for repressed democracy activists in China. If Eastern Europe represented a non-violent victory for freedom over communism, Tiananmen Square represented the victory of the communist state's use of violence against the force of popular will. It showed the lengths such regimes go to maintain absolute power.

One case of repression drew Shanker's particular attention. Han Dongfang was a railway worker who had found himself thrust into leadership of an autonomous workers union movement that emerged during the Tiananmen Square protests. While he escaped the violence unleashed on the protesters, he was later arrested, held in solitary confinement, and then purposely exposed to inmates with a highly infectious and aggressive form of tuberculosis. As part of an overall campaign led by the AFL-CIO, Shanker wrote Chinese officials to urge that Han be released and allowed to travel to the United States. The AFT's *American Teacher* publicized his case. Shanker pressed Richard Shifter, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, to intervene on Han's behalf, which he did. In the end, Han was released and allowed to travel to get urgent medical treatment in the United States (the costs were paid for by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)). After recovering, Han traveled widely in the United States, speaking to union groups. Ultimately, he was denied permission to reenter mainland China. Accordingly, he settled in Hong Kong, where he established the China Labour Bulletin in 1994. The AFT (and later the Albert Shanker Institute) became steady supporters and backers of Han's work to publicize and support independent worker actions, distribute information, broadcast live radio call-in shows into China, and offer legal and financial assistance to worker activists in China.

In Hong Kong, when the handover took place in 1997, limited British rights were kept as part of Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "one country, two systems." Szeto was elected to the Legislative Council (LegCo) from 1985-97 as the representative of the professional sector for teaching and after the handover, he was elected to a generally contested seat. Until his death in 2011, Szeto Wah was the acknowledged leader of the democracy movement in Hong Kong, but he was less well known outside the territory because he did not speak English.²⁰⁷ Unlike Szeto, other prominent politicians who had grown up in Hong Kong were taught English as a primary language in the schools, so they had a greater ability to make contacts in the West. The AFT arranged meetings for Szeto with public figures in the United States during several trips he made in the 1990s. At the 1992 AFT convention, Szeto gave the main international affairs speech and, in 2002, Sandra Feldman awarded him the AFT's Bayard Rustin Human Rights Award. In 2001, he received Education International's Albert Shanker Human and Trade Union Rights Award. In 2002, he delivered a special Albert Shanker lecture, under the auspices of the Albert Shanker Institute.

AFL-CIO Foreign Affairs

Next to Lane Kirkland himself, Shanker was the most highly visible union leader identified with the AFL-CIO's foreign policy. Indeed, in left-wing attacks on the AFL-CIO, the two leaders were indistinguishable. This was, in fact, understandable: Kirkland and Shanker were in synchrony on nearly all aspects of AFL-CIO foreign policy based on their common understanding of international affairs, democratic rights, and communism.

²⁰⁶ Interview with David Dorn, December 14, 2011.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

In service of their shared goals, Shanker willingly carried the AFL-CIO's water at conventions and other public events as well as in the media. He did so on a whole host of issues—Israel and the Middle East, Central America, Poland, the Soviet Union, defense, NATO, Chile, and South Africa, among others. He also represented the AFL-CIO at nearly all international forums, including the ICFTU, the ILO, the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the OECD, the European Federation of Trade Unions, the congresses of Japanese trade union federations, and ORIT (the ICFTU's regional organization for Latin America). There was no place Shanker was sent where he could not be trusted to represent the AFL-CIO's interests and policies. Even as the most junior member on the Executive Council, in 1974, Shanker was trusted by George Meany to carry out delicate labor diplomacy in Japan.

One issue that gave AFL-CIO leaders indigestion was the constant effort by a small group of its members, together with some liberal politicians, to get the federation to ease its no-contacts policy in regard to communist trade unions. The no-contacts policy applied to communist state-controlled trade unions from the Soviet bloc, China, and Cuba and any other trade union controlled by a dictatorship, right or left. Government-controlled unions in Franco's Spain, Oliveira's Portugal, and Pinochet's Chile were in the same category as those in Brezhnev's Soviet Union. For the AFL-CIO, the policy grew out of the fundamental, principled conviction that the organization should not grant legitimacy to fake trade unions that, instead of representing workers, had been turned into political tools to repress them. Every year, Shanker took an active part in helping the AFL-CIO defeat legislative efforts led by Senator George McGovern to eliminate the no-contacts ban, which the U.S. government followed at the AFL-CIO's behest, by lobbying congressmen and explaining the issue to policy and opinion makers.²⁰⁸

Central America

On Central America, many organizations on the Left generally sympathized with violent Marxist guerillas against violent right-wing military juntas. The AFL-CIO did not choose between these political extremes. Instead, it supported democratic elections, freedom of association, and independent trade unions and rejected the use of violence to seize power. In El Salvador, AIFLD supported land reform and democratic unions at a time of civil war. It backed the country's first free elections in 1984, won by the centrist Christian Democrat Jose Napoleón Duarte. The AFL-CIO sent scores of observers, including many AFT leaders, in a broad international effort to protect the legitimacy of the election. In Nicaragua, the AFL-CIO opposed the right-wing Somoza government as well as the left-wing Sandinista regime and instead supported the embattled independent union federation CUT and the independent newspaper *La Prensa*. Through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Kirkland and Shanker secured needed funding for AIFLD to help maintain a network of democratic non-governmental organizations in both countries.

In January 1981, the issue became personal for the AFL-CIO, with the Salvadoran military's assassination of two AIFLD representatives, Michael Hammer and Mark Perlman, and the head of the land reform institute and campesino union, Rudolfo Viera. Shanker knew Hammer. In a telegram to his family, he wrote, "His courage in fighting for free labor's cause in a dangerous place is an inspiration to all those struggling around the world to build free trade unions."²⁰⁹

Shanker's support for the AFL-CIO's work in Central America took several forms. He approved a six-month sabbatical for a staff member to work at AIFLD to devise education and political strategies on Central

²⁰⁸ Gregory Humphrey, "Admission of Representatives of 'Purported Labor Organizations' to the U.S. and its Implications for American Trade Unions," masters' thesis, Georgetown University, 1989. Interview with Humphrey, November 29, 2011.

²⁰⁹ Telegram to Mrs. Michael Hammer, January 2, 1981, Reuther Library, WSU, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 30, File 25.

America. He led the floor fights at AFL-CIO conventions where Central America became a contentious political issue. He supported a broad education program for AFL-CIO leaders organized by AIFLD in which several hundred local and national trade unionists, including many AFT leaders and staff, traveled to El Salvador and Nicaragua to see first hand the efforts of AIFLD to support free trade unionists.²¹⁰ An AFT international affairs department staff person was detailed to AIFLD for a month to work in Nicaragua with teachers and university staff. He prepared a report on the “textbook” takeover of the universities by the Sandinistas.²¹¹ Shanker always made a point at AFT gatherings and AFL-CIO executive council meetings to thank AIFLD and its representatives for their work in the field, always noting that they were on the front lines of the struggle for free trade unionism.

Against this background, some U.S. trade unionists continued to meet representatives of the Sandinistas and FMLN (the El Salvador guerilla movement) and to join coalitions supporting these extreme movements. Kirkland and Shanker communicated with their members to remind them of democratically-adopted policies supporting El Salvador’s and Nicaragua’s non-violent free trade unionists. In the spring of 1987, a major “mobilization for Central America and South Africa” was organized in Washington, D.C. connecting support for the FMLN and Sandinistas with support for the PLO and other violent extremist movements. The aim was to create a “popular front” in which the organizers could convince democratic organizations like unions to convey legitimacy on non-democratic movements. In a *Where We Stand* column, Shanker described the actual anti-democratic positions of the organizers and reminded readers of the Popular Fronts of the 1930s in which communists manipulated democrats into supporting the USSR. He admonished readers to heed his mother’s warning not “to hang out with the wrong crowd.”²¹²

International Affairs Committee

Al Shanker served on the AFL-CIO’s international affairs committee almost from the start of his membership on the executive council. After 15 years, in 1989, Shanker was appointed chairman. Tom Kahn, who in 1986 succeeded Irving Brown as director of the AFL-CIO international affairs department, set out some ambitious goals—reorganizing the federation’s four regional institutes, pressing ahead with support for worker rights movements in the Soviet bloc, supporting the black South African trade union movement, and most importantly educating and training a broad cross-section within the labor movement on the importance of the federation’s international affairs work. Shanker had worked closely with Kahn since the early 1960s and had collaborated with him directly on the International Sakharov Hearings, the Madrid Helsinki Review Conference, relations with Congress, Central America, and, of course, Poland.

As chairman of the international affairs committee, Shanker led a subcommittee of the AFL-CIO executive council to examine events in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev and determine whether the policies of glasnost and perestroika merited a change in federation policy. He represented the executive council with Lane Kirkland at foreign policy events. At the AFL-CIO convention in the fall of 1989, he was able to meet Lech Walesa and to orchestrate a handshake of solidarity among worker leaders from all over the world. Similarly, in June 1990, Shanker greeted Nelson Mandela at AFL-CIO headquarters. Shanker believed these individuals represented something important not just for their countries but for the United States as well. In a column welcoming Lech Walesa to the United States in 1989, he wrote:

²¹⁰ Interviews with Edward J. McElroy, Eugenia Kemble, David Dorn, Ruth Wattenberg.

²¹¹ “Nicaraguan Universities Betrayed,” by Eric Chenoweth, *Freedom House*, June 1988.

²¹² “Avoiding the Wrong Crowd,” *WWS*, April 19, 1987.

[W]e owe you. . . for helping to restore our confidence in the future of democracy. . . . Solidarity reversed the trend toward totalitarian states and showed that people still longed for human rights—and the way to attain and preserve them was through a democratic form of government. And now we see democracy spreading throughout the world. And we thank you for demonstrating so powerfully that free trade unions are essential to a democratic society. Many people here and in other industrialized nations have forgotten that.²¹³

Shanker was part of another drama at the 1989 AFL-CIO convention. At that moment, workers at the Vorkuta mines in the Arctic had gone on strike with both economic and political demands. In the period of glasnost, miners had been the strongest pressure on Mikhail Gorbachev to open the system further and to demand real, not pseudo, democratic change. The Vorkuta miners had gone further than anyone by demanding the revocation of Article 6 of the Soviet constitution, the basis for the Communist Party's rule. The miners asked the AFL-CIO to send a delegation to investigate the government's harsh treatment of them during the strike. Kirkland named Shanker to lead the delegation of union presidents from the United Mine Workers, Bricklayers, Building and Construction Trades, and several others. Ludmilla Thorne of Freedom House served as intermediary with the miners. The Shanker-led delegation went to the Soviet embassy in Washington to obtain visas. But after being politely ushered into the building, their request was officiously denied. The delegation never went. In the end, the government successfully divided the miners with piecemeal offers. The most radical of them were fired.

Another duty of the committee chairman was to present international affairs resolutions to the AFL-CIO convention. In 1991, Shanker was ready for the AFL-CIO to meet the next era. In answer to the question, "What is there to do now that communism is dead?", Shanker said:

[T]he cause of the trade union movement was never simply a fight against communism—
notwithstanding all of our critics—but a fight for freedom, democracy and human rights. That fight was
in the former Soviet Union, that fight was in the Philippines, that fight was in Chile, that fight is still in
China and Cuba and it is today in Thailand and Haiti: that fight is anywhere trade unions and human
rights are repressed. . . .

There was, he said, a danger of the AFL-CIO's withdrawing from international affairs just as globalization and the internationalization of labor would directly impact U.S. workers the most. "Our members are affected when authoritarian leaders team up with multinational corporations to keep workers oppressed and wages low. . . . [They] are affected when the U.S. must devote inordinate resources to the defense of the democratic world."

...

In addition to the AFL-CIO's international operations, Shanker was involved in many related activities that indicate the depth of his international work. Three are presented here.

Transatlantic and Transpacific Labor Understanding

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Shanker helped form and belonged to two initiatives aimed at promoting stronger relationships among pro-defense and pro-NATO trade unionists in Europe, the Pacific, and the United States. The first, the Labor Committee for Transatlantic Understanding, was set up by Joseph Godson, the former labor attaché to the United Kingdom. Now in retirement, he remained involved with leading trade unionists and Labour Party politicians from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, the United States, and France in promoting the transatlantic alliance. The second initiative, the Labor Committee for Pacific Affairs,

²¹³ "Democracy Owes You," WWS, November 12, 1989.

was an extension of the first and organized by Joseph Godson's son, Roy Godson, who had been involved with Shanker on various international issues since the late 1960s.

Shanker was active in both, but he had a particular interest in the Pacific Affairs group. In February 1983, he went to Australia at the invitation of the teachers union. There, he met Robert Hawke, the leader of the Australian Labor Party and future Prime Minister, who agreed to join the Labor Committee for Pacific Affairs. Shanker also sent a letter to leading New Zealand trade union leaders in advance of a delegation to New Zealand that included David Dorn and Herb Magidson of the AFT and Bricklayers president John T. Joyce. The letter proved useful when left-wing propagandists—resurrecting a familiar tactic—tried to smear the committee and the delegation as “CIA-funded.”²¹⁴ The Labor Committee helped to establish two strong relationships in Australia—Prime Minister Hawke and, later on, Sharan Burrow, who became the head of the Australian Education Union.²¹⁵

Soviet Jewry

Shanker continued to respond to requests for action from the Jewish Labor Committee and the National Council on Soviet Jewry (a permanent group established after the Ad Hoc Conference), especially regarding refuseniks. In March 1983, for example, Shanker sent a strong letter to Soviet Procurator General Alexander Rekunkov regarding the arrest of Iosif Begun, described later by the *New York Times* “as one of the Soviet Union's most prominent campaigners for Jewish rights.”²¹⁶ Arrested for the third time, he was charged with “spreading anti-Soviet propaganda.” In response, Shanker asked Rekunkov to “let me know what actions you could take on Mr. Begun's behalf” in order to allow him to join his wife and son in Israel. The next year, Begun was released and allowed to emigrate. In 1985-86, the AFT also carried out a campaign on behalf of repressed Hebrew teachers, a subset of refuseniks who tried to pass on the Hebraic tradition to young Jews. Shanker wrote a letter to the Soviet ambassador to the U.S. and the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He asked AFT leaders to do the same. The AFT convention passed a resolution supporting these teachers at its 1986 convention, after which Shanker sought the support of the AFL-CIO.²¹⁷

In 1987, Shanker took a lead role in the labor movement's participation in a rally of the National Council on Soviet Jewry, the first ever to be held on the Washington Mall, organized around Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to the United States. At that time, emigration had begun to increase, but by a small percentage from its low of around 1,000 per year. There were at least 20,000 refuseniks who had been formally denied exit permits and about 400,000 of 2 million Jews who expressed a desire to emigrate to Israel. Shanker told *The Observer-Reporter*, a daily newspaper in western Pennsylvania, “It is important to keep alive the pressure which indicates that the American people will largely judge the Soviet Union by how well it treats its own people.” He said that Gorbachev had yet to understand that “the treatment of Soviet Jews continues to be the issue that shows people that the Soviet Union has not yet opened up.”²¹⁸ Shanker understood the issue well. He knew that there would be a flood of émigrés if the system allowed it. In the 15 years after the gates opened in 1989, 1.5 million Jews from the former Soviet republics emigrated. Most were from Russia, and two-thirds went to Israel.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Letters to presidents of Australian and New Zealand Trade Union Centers, et. al., Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker.

²¹⁵ In later years, Burrow went on to become the general secretary of the Australian Trades Union Congress, vice-president of Education International, and president and general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation.

²¹⁶ “Iosif Begun: A Defiant Man,” *New York Times*, February 13, 1987.

²¹⁷ Reuther Library, Office of the AFT President: Albert Shanker, Box 53, Folders 9-10.

²¹⁸ “Jewish Immigration Rally Planned for Eve of Gorbachev Visit,” *The Observer-Reporter*, November 29, 1987.

²¹⁹ Mark Tolts, “Mass Aliyah and Jewish Emigration from Russia: Dynamics and Factors,” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2, Winter 2003, 71-96.

Israel and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)

Shanker remained active in the Jewish Labor Committee after formally retiring as a JLC officer, especially if called on to support its actions. One occasion was a 1988 hearing before the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) reviewing Israel's compliance with worker rights standards under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which grants some U.S. trading partners reduced tariffs. The JLC asked Shanker to represent both itself and the labor movement generally. This was not a minor issue. The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, joined by a number of other human rights and Middle Eastern-related organizations, had for the first time submitted a petition claiming that Israel was violating basic worker rights and therefore should be suspended from the GSP. Given the importance of U.S. trade to Israel's economy, suspending Israel from the GSP would have had devastating effects.

Shanker was the senior AFL-CIO representative at the hearing. He argued strongly—in fact with a chiding tone—that the USTR's office was discriminating against Israel, whose compliance with ILO standards had been verified by the ILO. He pointed out that all other Middle Eastern countries which had been granted GSP had clear records of worker rights violations. While Israel was a longstanding democracy and ally of the United States, these other Middle Eastern countries on the GSP list were either brutal dictatorships or at best repressive monarchies. He asked that the USTR improve its procedures for accepting first-time complaints without any investigation (Israel was chosen while, for example, Singapore and Zimbabwe were not).

Israel did not lose its GSP status, but the experience led the JLC, with Shanker's encouragement and the AFT's financial support, to do a thorough review of worker rights in Arab League states (many of which had GSP status). After three years, the report was issued, having a substantial impact on the debate. For the first time, someone had prepared an actual comparison of Israel's democratic record with the Arab states' anti-democratic record. Shanker sent the report to all AFT and IFFTU leaders with a letter stating that the report should place in proper perspective the discussion of human rights in Israel and the occupied territories.

9

The IFFTU Years and Beyond 1981-1997

From 1981 to 1993, Fred Van Leeuwen and Albert Shanker served as general secretary and president, respectively, of the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU). Together, they presided over unprecedented growth in both the number of affiliates and the total number of members. Shanker called the work of the IFFTU over this period a victory "in a major ideological battle persuading most teachers that they are workers who belong in the trade union movement."²²⁰ In this time, the IFFTU increased membership to 8 million, strengthened relations among its affiliates, participated in major human and trade union rights struggles, helped craft international trade union standards for public employees and teachers at the International Labor Organization (ILO), and introduced education reform into the union agenda.

The main success of Shanker and Van Leeuwen, however, was the IFFTU's dissolution in 1993. Over a period of three years, 1989-92, they negotiated a merger between IFFTU and its rival international, the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP), to create a new organization called Education International (EI). It immediately became the largest global union federation in the international free trade union movement, with affiliated organizations having more than 20 million members. Shanker, who played a central role in the negotiations, considered the creation of EI to be one of his most important achievements.²²¹

First Principles

The two officers did not have a full meeting until *after* their election at the IFFTU World Congress in Panama City. From early on, however, Van Leeuwen knew that he and Shanker "were on the same wavelength." They both were committed to human and trade union rights and to integrating IFFTU's guiding principles into the day-to-day work of the organization. For both men, this meant opposing dictatorships of all stripes. Unlike many Western Europeans, Van Leeuwen was not uncomfortable with anti-communism as part of this framework. Nor did Van Leeuwen subscribe to any conspiracy theories about the AFL-CIO or its regional institutes. He willingly accepted funds from them to support the IFFTU's work (just as he did from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the German social democratic foundation, and other European foundations). The two officers also discovered that they shared a strong commitment to defend the right of Israel to exist. Van Leeuwen was not Jewish; his commitment came from a deep aversion to anti-Semitism, racism, and discrimination in general and also from visiting friends and distant family in Israel when he joined his father, a sailor, on his regular shipping route to Ashdod and Haifa. On one trip, after becoming a teacher union activist, Van Leeuwen sought out Shalom Levin of the Israel Teachers Union, with whom he developed a friendship. He helped Levin organize an international teachers' conference in Tel Aviv on November 1980 aimed at combating racism, anti-Semitism and violations of human rights.)

²²⁰ Albert Shanker, Speech to the 1989 World Congress of IFFTU, Toronto, Canada published in IFFTU Congress Bulletin. FES Archives.

²²¹ Interviews with David Dorn, September 15, 2011, and Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

From the outset, the roles of IFFTU's officers were clear, according to Van Leeuwen:

Shanker was the one with the grand ideas. I was the person who was trying to find the practical ways to make little steps toward those goals.

Shanker did respond to practical needs, however. In 1982, for example, Van Leeuwen needed his backing for moving IFFTU's office from Brussels to Amsterdam and investing in new technologies. "Fortunately, we shared the same fascination for new information technologies and believed that we should promote their use in school and union environments." This combination of high-minded and practical leadership translated into "the best possible president a general secretary could have," he said. Shanker, however, offered Van Leeuwen something much more:

Remember, I was the youngest general secretary ever elected to head a global union. I was barely 30. Al was my mentor throughout the years until the day he died. I wouldn't be sitting here without him.

Shanker's lessons were basic but profound. "First," he taught Van Leeuwen, "stick to your principles. Always. That is foremost." This meant above all maintaining IFFTU's character as a *free* teacher union federation and including only democratic and independent teacher unions. It also meant challenging abuses of human rights and democratic principles anywhere, whether in authoritarian regimes, communist dictatorships, and, where merited, democratically elected governments. "Two," Van Leeuwen continued, "he was a master in showing how political struggles of different kinds, such as achieving democracy, fostering human rights, reducing poverty, or boosting the quality of our public school systems were all interconnected."²²²

Van Leeuwen tried to design and carry out a program reflecting these comprehensive ideas. If there were any differences in approach or sensibility between the two men, usually Shanker left these for Van Leeuwen to work out through the AFT's international affairs director. For Shanker, it was important that IFFTU and AFT policy and action be in basic synchrony.

Human and Trade Union Rights

The IFFTU Congress in Panama where Shanker and Van Leeuwen were elected took place from December 6 to 12, 1981. Unfolding events required their immediate attention even before Van Leeuwen's return to Europe:

I remember the first telex message in my new position, signed with Al as president, was to General Jaruzelski urging the release of all the people he had arrested with the imposition of martial law [on December 13], including Lech Walesa.

In concert with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Van Leeuwen and Shanker encouraged IFFTU members to participate in a "Day of International Solidarity" on January 30, 1982, and to take other actions (protest letters, fundraising for humanitarian purposes, etc.).²²³ These actions and protests were ongoing. Later on, in 1983,

Shanker sent me with 40,000 Dutch guilders [\$25,000] to give to the Education Section of Solidarność. It was linked with the AFL-CIO Polish Workers Aid Fund and ICFTU program. So, I went to Poland on a visa posing as an antique buyer. It was illegal, of course, what I was doing.

²²² Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011, et. seq.

²²³ Letter of Van Leeuwen and Shanker to IFFTU affiliates, January 1981, FES archives.

Van Leeuwen made contact with the underground group and started a long-lasting program of targeted support for teachers. "I would dare say that in this way we contributed to the democratic changes ultimately won by Solidarność."²²⁴

As noted above, in early 1988, Shanker supported the idea of an IFFTU delegation to Poland to meet with "Teachers' Solidarity" representatives and the underground education movement, an independent but allied arm of the union opposition. The delegation was the first from an ICFTU-affiliated trade secretariat. Made up of Van Leeuwen, former IFFTU president Erich Frister, National Education Federation (FEN)'s international relations director, Alain Mouchoux, and Eric Chenoweth, a staff person shared between the AFT and the Committee in Support of Solidarity, the group traveled to Poland in mid-February 1988 for a week and had a number of carefully arranged meetings with underground activists and aboveground opposition leaders. They came into contact with an unexpectedly large network of educators inside and outside the classroom who published independent education and union newspapers, kept up-to-date on education issues in the West, and promoted democratic education in the classroom. The delegation also met with university educators, representatives of cultural initiatives, and, during a visit to Lublin, representatives of a local Teachers Solidarity chapter and a professor at the semi-independent Catholic University. Their meetings demonstrated the continuing vitality and creativity of Solidarity in maintaining a clandestine movement. All of Solidarity's activities remained illegal even though the regime was no longer arresting people en masse.

After the roundtable talks in early 1989 brought about the re-legalization of the union, the Education Section of Solidarity was provided initial help by IFFTU to restart activities aboveground. At the IFFTU Congress in Toronto, the Education Section and two organizations from Hungary, the Democratic Teachers Union and the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers, became the first members from Eastern European countries in IFFTU's history. (They were later joined by teacher unions from Bulgaria, Czech and Slovak Republics, Croatia, Kosova, Romania, and Serbia, among others).

IFFTU's activities also reflected Shanker's focus on Chile and South Africa. For example, IFFTU organized the first trip of Colegio de Profesores leader Osvaldo Verdugo to Europe, which blunted the efforts of the Communist Party faction in Colegio to deflect money from the Colegio's democratic faction. IFFTU also joined the AFT in organizing a large delegation of observers for the plebiscite. In South Africa, it developed close relations with NEUSA (the National Education Union of South Africa) and its successor organization, the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). Thulas Nxesi, NEUSA's and then SADTU's president, was elected to be the second president of Education International (2004-08).

Throughout this period, Van Leeuwen kept abreast of developments in many countries and often asked Shanker to sign or co-sign letters and cables to protest violations of human and trade union rights. For example, IFFTU's appeal on behalf of S. Veli Mnyandu, the NEUSA activist arrested in 1988, prompted the AFT to initiate its own appeal. The coups in Fiji in 1987-88 prompted immediate reaction by IFFTU and Shanker, among many other examples.

Organizational Work

Beyond the essential job of defending human and trade union rights, the core work of IFFTU was organizational: enlarging membership; providing technical training and material assistance to undeveloped teacher organizations; networking with affiliates; planning and conducting the meetings of the leadership and membership (annual executive committee meetings and once-every-four-year congresses); and relating to other international organizations like UNESCO, the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

²²⁴ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

The main targets for new member organizations were in the developing countries. Teacher organizations in the developed democracies of the Northern hemisphere had already chosen their international organization, either IFFTU or WCOTP, and identified themselves with them. For the IFFTU, it was important to target countries where teacher organizations were both democratic and oriented towards trade unionism and collective bargaining. This often overlapped with countries where teacher organizations were involved in democratic movements for change, such as Chile and South Africa and countries in political transition, such as India. In the Philippines, after the fall of Marcos, the IFFTU initiated training programs with democratically-oriented groups of teachers who played an important role in reforming PPSTA, the official teachers' organization.

In South Korea, the IFFTU supported a breakaway teachers' group, Chonkyojo, which wanted to organize a teachers' union. After organizing strikes and protests, it worked to gain collective bargaining rights through legislation. An IFFTU project in Sri Lanka supported both Tamil and Sinhalese teachers' organizations. In Africa, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zimbabwe were other examples of successful projects. The Kenya teachers' organization, in particular, participated in the country's evolution into an electoral democracy. Among the teachers' unions that IFFTU supported, those in Chile, Kenya, Indonesia, and Malaysia became majority representative unions, while in Korea, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, they were minority organizations that were nevertheless effective in changing national education and labor policies.²²⁵

The independent trade union organizations that emerged in Eastern Europe starting in 1988 contributed to the transition to democracy throughout the region. It became clear, however, that the old communist trade union organizations would be difficult to dislodge. The new unions lacked resources while the old unions retained resources for providing services, built up over the communist period, such as vacation resorts. Among teachers, even Solidarity in Poland was a minority organization, in contrast to the official union established by the Jaruzelski regime.

In 1990, the IFFTU executive board held an historic meeting in Budapest to bolster the independent unions, the first time a trade secretariat had met in an Eastern European country. Shanker reported on it in his column. The new unions from "Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Croatia are sharing problems with leaders of teachers' unions in the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Japan, Italy, Venezuela, and Ghana." The new unions faced enormous problems: entrenched non-democratic communist unions, a disastrous economic situation, a lack of experience, and overwhelming problems reforming education. Still, Shanker rejoiced in signs of democratic change—problems and all.²²⁶

IFFTU and Education Reform

In the view of Fred Van Leeuwen, Albert Shanker's greatest influence on the IFFTU was in the area of education policy and education reform.

Shanker, reinventing his persona from union militant to policy statesman, had become one of the most important figures in the United States in the field of education reform. Following the 1983 report *A Nation At Risk*, which laid out the poor educational results being attained in the United States, Shanker took the view that the quality of education in the U.S. was not only a national concern but also a core union issue. The union's members, of course, had to be concerned with teaching as a profession. More than that, Shanker had concluded that unless the union and teachers generally tried to solve the problems of education quality and until schools were improved, the public education system itself was at risk, in danger of losing the public's support.

²²⁵ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

²²⁶ "The Free Teachers' Unions Meet," WWS, June 10, 1990.

Shanker quickly took the issue of education reform to an international stage. In the mid-1980s, he initiated discussions on education reform among leaders of IFFTU unions in the industrialized OECD countries. "Al was among the first people to recognize the global dimension of education policy and education reform," said Van Leeuwen. The discussions had an informal character. Education reform was and remains a controversial subject. Everyone, he said, "was invited to speak their minds. Most of the issues still dominating the present-day education agenda, from performance pay to education vouchers to the use of new technologies in education, were debated in depth. Some union leaders sought his advice on how to avoid a conflict between the union's role as defender of its members' interests and its role in promoting better education quality." From these discussions, Shanker also developed and honed many of his ideas on education reform.²²⁷

Both as the IFFTU president and as a leader in education policy, Shanker several times addressed the general plenary of the TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee) of the OECD, which gathered all leaders of national trade union federations of OECD countries. In addition, he was asked to address all the education ministers of the OECD countries. "It was unusual for a union leader to address the ministers meetings of the OECD," said Van Leeuwen. He said Shanker got the full and undivided attention of the entire group.

A wide range of issues were discussed within the IFFTU aimed at improving education quality, including professional development, the role of education unions in contributing to education policy, the use of technology in schools (the IFFTU organized a major conference on the subject in Washington, D.C. in 1989), the accountability of the teaching profession, and even questions such as merit pay or performance pay. The issues were significant for teachers' unions. In the United States, many education reform ideas such as merit pay and vouchers were aimed directly at weakening the teachers' unions.

Shanker's command of education and trade union issues made him a much sought-after speaker for many organizations' annual meetings or congresses. He was a consummate speaker who could present complex ideas in simple terms to any audience. He was invited annually to speak at the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Organization, an IFFTU member, as well as by the British Columbia Teachers Association, which was not an IFFTU member. Britain's National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) and the German Education Union (GEW) regularly invited Shanker to national and regional conferences. He was a frequent guest of the Israel Teachers Union and the Japan Teachers Union. He was even invited by WCOTP affiliates, including twice by Scandinavian teacher organizations. He also spoke at congresses and conferences of independent teacher unions in new democracies such as Bulgaria, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, and Spain.

Shanker related easily with people of different ideologies or political beliefs. This was often where he had the most influence. The General Union of Education Personnel (ABOP) in the Netherlands and the Australian Education Union (AEU) are two examples. Both had left-wing orientations with some anti-American currents, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the leaders of each, Ella Vogelaar of ABOP and Sharan Burrow of the AEU, wanted their members to listen to Shanker speak about education reform and teacher unionism. In the case of the ABOP, Shanker was the keynote at its 150th anniversary congress (Vogelaar brought him back for more meetings).²²⁸ In Australia, Burrow invited Shanker twice, first when she was head of the New South Wales branch of AEU and then after she became its national leader.

There were several results from Shanker's international work in education reform. The most significant impact within the IFFTU and Education International, according to Van Leeuwen, was the notion that

²²⁷ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011. See also IFFTU special committee archives at the FES library.

²²⁸ Vogelaar became Minister of Education in a Labor Party government.

the improvement of our public schools and of education quality is also a union responsibility and that we must develop our own reform ideas and proposals, rather than wait for others to present theirs and then have to respond defensively. There is no contradiction between the trade union and professional roles of teachers' unions. These are complementary roles, not contradictory. He also taught us that only the members of a profession can determine and maintain its professional standards. As soon as others, outside the profession, start telling us how to teach and which standards to achieve, and to treat us like assembly line workers, we should become worried. He liked to compare educators with members of the medical profession. Teachers are steering the learning process, identifying, diagnosing learning problems and writing the necessary prescriptions.²²⁹

Shanker looked closely at how education was organized in other countries as a basis for discussion in the United States. As Van Leeuwen saw it, "He didn't come here just to present his ideas. He found some of his ideas affirmed in other countries as well."²³⁰

In Germany, he found models for vocational and technical education as well as for "comprehensive schools." In Japan, he found out that the highly pressurized K-12 system ended in a wholly inadequate higher education system where students slacked off. AFT delegations also learned that Japanese K-12 teachers had fewer classes, fewer students, and large amounts of preparatory time and collaboration. In the United Kingdom and the Northern European countries, Shanker found high achievement and high centralization in key aspects of an education system: curriculum, teacher certification, teaching, and school assessment. These international examples strengthened his support for ideas such as creating national standards for certification of teachers, national curricula, and a national assessment system.²³¹

During the 1980s and 1990s, Shanker directed the AFT international affairs department to organize a number of exchange trips around education reform themes. The exchanges still included a strong trade union component, but Shanker wanted to convince the delegates further about the need for unifying trade union and education policy within the framework of the union, just as he tried to do with his international counterparts. He particularly admired an innovative education system in Germany called comprehensive schools. After visiting the Köln-Holewide Comprehensive School in Cologne, he followed up by organizing a high-level group of AFT vice presidents and education specialists to join him in studying it on site. The AFT's quarterly journal, *American Educator*, featured the trip to Köln-Holewide in its Spring 1988 issue:

[The delegation] found a school whose student population was composed of a fairly equal mix of high-middle- and low ability students; a substantial proportion . . . of Germany's Turkish minority population; and a representative mix from middle- and lower income households. Yet only 1 percent of the school's students drop out, compared to a national West German average of 14 percent; and 60 percent of its students score sufficiently well on high school exit exams to be admitted to a four-year college, compared to a national average of only 27 percent. Moreover, the school suffers practically no truancy, hardly any teacher absenteeism, and only minor discipline problems.²³²

²²⁹ Interview with Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ "How They Do It In West Germany: Connecting School With Work," WWS, February 2, 1990; "Our Students Work, Theirs Loaf: Calls Japanese Colleges a 'Charade,'" WWS, March 18, 1984; et al.

²³² *American Educator*, Spring 1988.

An interview with Anne Ratzki, the school's founder and headmaster, was featured in the same issue and Ratzki was invited to the United States to travel to different districts where this approach might be adopted. She became a featured guest at several AFT conventions and the union's professional issues conferences.²³³

AFT vice presidents and staff also went to the United Kingdom to examine professional standards, and to Finland, a high performer on world standardized testing, and Japan, with similarly high testing results, to examine student performance. These union and professional exchanges have been continued at the AFT by successive AFT presidents.

Education International

At the Toronto IFFTU Congress in 1989, Fred Van Leeuwen proposed for the first time to initiate talks with the WCOTP concerning a possible merger, since "a growing number of organizations now believe that professionalism and trade unionism are not conflicting concepts."²³⁴ The congress approved the idea, meaning Van Leeuwen had authority to pursue it with his counterpart at the WCOTP, Robert (Bob) Harris, from Australia. Van Leeuwen and Harris had both believed for some time that the competition between the two organizations had been counterproductive and wasteful of resources.

Shanker supported a merger between the IFFTU and WCOTP, just as he did between AFT and NEA. In his mind, any international merger had to have the following components: a democratic organization that was affiliated to the international labor movement, the ICFTU. The AFT had the same stipulation for merger with the NEA: that the merged organization affiliate with the AFL-CIO. Bob Harris and WCOTP's president, Mary Futrell, a recent president of NEA who had advocated in favor of an AFT-NEA merger, were both disposed towards the international merger.²³⁵

The IFFTU and the WCOTP agreed to five-member delegations from each organization: the president, general secretary, a staff representative, and two members of the executive board representing different regions. Shanker and Futrell agreed that European organizations—the largest and richest—should not dominate any new organization and that every region should be represented in the new structure. To help ensure this, they agreed that the merger meetings would be held on a rotating basis in each region. Over two years, the two delegations met on all five major continents, with each meeting hosted by an IFFTU or WCOTP organization. Despite being diagnosed with cancer during this period, Shanker did not miss a meeting.

For Shanker, the most important issue was "the establishment of a new international organization based on the principle of independent and democratic teacher unionism tied to the international free trade union movement," said Van Leeuwen. In this regard, Shanker insisted that the new organization retain the principles of the IFFTU and that it "be open only to independent and democratic teacher unions and associations." This was not intransigence. The teacher organizations within the WCOTP that were advocating for a merger were mostly European (but not only) and affiliated with their trade union federations or congresses, which in turn were affiliated with the ICFTU. No one had broken down the numbers, but these labor-affiliated organizations made up a majority of WCOTP membership.

Shanker was not concerned about the NEA dwarfing the AFT in one international organization, even if NEA's membership was 2½ times greater. The aim was to build a unified worldwide teacher organization that could give teachers and their unions everywhere greater power and that could also strengthen the international trade union movement. Only maintaining the principle of free and independent unionism, however, would

²³³ At the time, the conferences were organized under the name QuEST and are now called TEACH.

²³⁴ Newsletter of the XVth IFFTU Congress in Toronto, May 30, 1989, FES Archives, IFFTU.

²³⁵ This section is based on interviews with Fred van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011, Mary Futrell, September 23, 2011, David Dorn, September 15, 2011, Phil Kugler, November 30, 2011, and Edward J. McElroy, December 1, 2011, and archival material from FES and Reuther Libraries.

ensure the democratic character of the new international. Shanker spent a great deal of time with Futrell discussing the different aspects of membership qualifications. Futrell said that both were in agreement “that any union coming in had to be a democratic organization. In other words, it couldn’t be an organization controlled by the government.” The government-controlled teachers’ union in China, therefore, would never be eligible for membership. Most IFFTU and WCOTP met the requirements, but some could not. Shanker and the IFFTU delegation put forward a proposal that at the time of the merger, all members of each organization would automatically become members but that all of them would formally pledge to work towards achieving those democratic qualifications within two years. According to Fred Van Leeuwen, some organizations did adjust their procedures and structures to meet the criteria, but a number decided not to join.

There remained the issue of what would happen if there was disagreement about the democratic character of an existing or new organization. At one meeting, Shanker proposed a solution of a three-person fact-finding committee with the power to make recommendations to the new board. “He drafted the procedures by hand as we sat there,” said Van Leeuwen. The result is a unique trade union structure, an independent committee of outside experts to determine the democratic qualifications of an organization. Its composition was sterling: former Australian Labor Party leader and prime minister Robert Hawke; former ICFTU general secretary John Vandervecken; and Stefan Nedzynski, the highly respected general secretary of the Postal, Telegraph, and Telecommunications International Union, headquartered in Berne, Switzerland, who had played a large role in European and ICFTU efforts to support Solidarity. Shanker did not recommend the committee members but knew and trusted each.

Having achieved the essential agreement on democratic criteria for membership, Shanker agreed to several proposals by Futrell, such as fixed representation for women (although he generally opposed quotas) and term limits for the president (he thought members should determine an officer’s term of service). He also agreed that in the new organization, Futrell would be president, Van Leeuwen would be general secretary, and he would have a new position of founding president.

The IFFTU and the WCOTP both dissolved in 1993 to form a new organization called Education International. The first full congress of EI was in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1995. In a period of cancer remission, Shanker knew this might be his last chance to educate his staff and leadership on international affairs. Between 40 and 50 AFT staff and executive council members attended with instructions to get to know all of the new EI members.

Despite his health problems and holding only a symbolic position in EI, Shanker attended quarterly executive board meetings before the 1995 Harare Congress and once afterward. In this period, Futrell said Shanker was highly supportive of her. “He respected that I was the president and he was emeritus,” she recalled. He gave her advice on issues, but never tried to take over meetings. “If I was in charge of the meeting, I was in charge of the meeting.” Their relationship carried over to the States: “A couple of times we would get together during the year and have lunch or something. He was very visionary. I liked the way he advocated about other people. It wasn’t just about AI but how can I make life better for other people. He was a great leader.” During his final illness, she went to his bedside. “He still wanted to talk issues.”

In the view of his international peers, Education International is the most important legacy of Albert Shanker. While Mary Futrell, Bob Harris, and Fred Van Leeuwen were all central to the negotiations, Shanker came up with the solutions that solved the main stumbling blocks to putting the IFFTU and the WCOTP together in one organization. In Van Leeuwen’s view, “The way the organization was formed and structured, the activities it is engaged in, and the important principles it is defending—it is more AI Shanker than anyone else.” Since 1993, the organization has grown from 20 million to more than 30 million members, and in both Futrell’s and Van Leeuwen’s separate assessments, EI’s most important achievement has been getting “every child access to quality education” to be an international priority. Van Leeuwen points also to another achievement, namely that today the vast majority of teacher organizations around the world are independent and democratic, partly due to political developments and partly due to the examples set by EI.

10

The Last Decade

The period of 1989 to 1991 was a blur of domestic and international activity for Albert Shanker. Within the U.S. he was meeting all the responsibilities of running the union and, as he said, “changing education in America.” Internationally, he was carrying out merger talks to create the largest international trade secretariat in the labor movement, leading education discussions with union leaders and government ministers, representing the AFL-CIO, furthering worker and human rights, and in general sharing his ideas about the intertwining of union and education policy. He traveled to Amsterdam, Australia (Sidney, Melbourne, Cairne), Bratislava, Brussels, Budapest, Frankfurt, Galway (Ireland), Geneva, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), London, Paris, Prague, Rome, Sarajevo, Stockholm, Tokyo, Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria, British Columbia, several places having repeat visits. In this period, he went to eight merger meetings of the IFFTU-WCOTP, attended two executive board meetings of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), spoke at five teacher union congresses and meetings in Canada, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, observed elections in Czechoslovakia, and participated in an international human rights congress (Soviet Union).

While there were many in the United States who turned inward and away from foreign affairs now that the principal threat to the U.S. was dissolving, Shanker remained a committed internationalist. He directed the AFT international affairs department to continue its dual mandate of helping independent teacher unions and fostering education for democracy. For this, a new project was needed.

Education for Democracy/International

The AFT’s Teachers Under Dictatorship (TUD) project continued to deal with helping teachers fighting dictatorship. Even in an age of democratic revolution, there was still no shortage of cases to deal with: a military coup in Fiji; the Thai government’s restrictions on teachers’ rights; the Tiananmen Square massacre; the South Korean government’s suppression of strikes by a new teachers’ union, among many others.

But the events of 1988-89, saw a new issue arise. In countries in transition from dictatorship to democracy—whether in South Africa, Chile, Poland, or other Eastern European countries—whole societies had been schooled under principles of inequality and dictatorship. With the exception of Chile, there was little or no direct experience by parts of society with democratic periods in these countries’ histories, if they existed at all. Teachers and their new independent unions in these countries sought a new form of support to help their students and societies institutionalize the new freedoms they had just gained. As Shanker had pointed out to AFT convention delegates in Boston in 1990,

What we have seen are the beginnings of democracy. We haven’t really seen democracy yet. We have seen the overthrow of dictatorship. Democracy is going to take generations to build and we have to be a part of that building because they won’t be able to do it alone.²³⁶

Shanker had frequently criticized the social studies textbooks taught in the United States and wondered how their authors could get the teaching about democracy so wrong. One textbook Shanker quoted stated that

²³⁶ AFT International Affairs Video, AFT convention, Boston, MA, 1990.

democracies had human rights, while communist countries had an equally valid set of economic rights. Not only is such relativism wrong, he wrote, the claim is false: clearly communist countries ban economic rights such as the right to form unions. Shanker wrote, “Absolutism distorts reality—but so does the kind of relativism by which we train kids to make no value judgments at all . . . indeed, to have no values.”²³⁷

In 1986, Shanker decided to do something about the problem. In a column titled “Endowment for Democracy At Home?” Shanker supported a proposal by philosopher Sidney Hook made in the annual Jefferson Lecture of the National Endowment for the Humanities to create an institution that would “sharpen students’ understanding of a free society, its responsibilities and opportunities, the burdens and dangers it faces.”²³⁸

Hook’s lecture inspired the AFT to launch a new project (joined by Freedom House and the Educational Excellence Network) called Education for Democracy. Its first task was to craft a bipartisan statement calling for the positive teaching of democracy in the schools. The statement made clear that the more than 200 prominent signers were not agitating for “our country right or wrong” but rather the clear-headed study of different political systems and the use of free inquiry to discover why democracy, warts and all, is preferable to dictatorship. A textbook survey was undertaken to analyze how democracy is actually taught. Among its findings was that history and civics textbooks were boring, without teaching the great struggle for democracy and human rights in the course of human history.²³⁹

The Education for Democracy Project statement changed the debate over the teaching of social studies, history, and civics. Although one can still find dull textbooks, there is a basic understanding in the field today that democracy generally and American democracy in particular need to be taught to U.S. students without the previous relativism that made democracy morally equivalent to other political systems, no matter how heinous or repressive.

The struggles for democracy in Eastern Europe, Chile, and South Africa provided the opportunity for “sharing of experiences.” The Eastern European story of Soviet subjugation and the inspiring struggle to break free of communist dictatorship needed to be taught in U.S. classrooms. Similarly, the AFT’s partners in countries emerging from dictatorships needed to transform curriculum, teaching materials, and teaching staffs. Teachers who had spent their professional lives being subservient and teaching subservience to power needed to be retrained or replaced.

In response to these needs, the AFT international affairs department created a new initiative called Education for Democracy/International (ED/I). Its aim was to help educators in Eastern Europe and other emerging democracies develop both democratic organizations representing teachers and democratic educational materials and methods to help institutionalize democratic ideas and practices in the education system. The project carried out dozens of training workshops for teacher unionists on basic principles of democratic organization (union structures, how to run a meeting, leadership skills, accountability, etc.). The AFT’s own training manuals for leaders were adapted and translated for the purpose. National trainers and organizers and other union staff from all levels of the AFT conducted workshops and taught “train-the-trainer” courses in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and later on in Russia and Ukraine.

ED/I also developed the Free Society Papers, a series of six teaching manuals on democratic ideas. The authors were asked to go to Eastern Europe to conduct a dozen “Free Society Seminars” in four Eastern

²³⁷ “Too Much Relativism in Teaching? We’re Neglecting the Issue of Values,” WWS, January 1, 1984.

²³⁸ “Endowment for Democracy At Home?” WWS, September 24, 1984. Hook’s full lecture, “Education in Defense of a Free Society,” was republished in *Commentary*, July 1984.

²³⁹ “Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles,” AFT Education for Democracy Project, 1987; “Democracy’s Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect” by Paul Gagnon, AFT Education for Democracy Project, 1989.

European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) for leading educators and teacher unionists. The pamphlets covered the topics of government, politics, culture, economy, and education in free societies and the meaning and teaching of democracy in the schools. Overall, they were translated into more than eight Eastern European languages and were used by several education ministries for developing curricula.²⁴⁰

A “classroom-to-classroom” project connected social studies teachers and their students with counterparts in not just Eastern European countries but also emerging democracies in South Africa, Chile, and elsewhere (there were about 200 classroom links in a half dozen countries). For U.S. teachers, ED/I and the Education for Democracy Project developed classroom teaching guides on six Eastern European countries (and later, China, Burma, and Tibet). Several were published in full in the AFT’s magazine, *American Educator*, distributed to all AFT K-12 and higher education members.

In Poland, Wiktor Kulerski, the underground Solidarity leader who had nurtured the independent education movement, decided to create a Foundation for Education for Democracy in Poland with similar aims. Kulerski involved the Education Section of the Polish trade union Solidarity, the AFT, and independent activists who could develop civic education materials for Poland’s teachers and schools. He invited Shanker and other AFT leaders and independent scholar Diane Ravitch to be co-founders of the foundation as a means of tying the foundation to the AFT tradition of “democracy in education, education for democracy.”²⁴¹

The AFT shared with the foundation civic education materials being developed through its Education for Democracy Project, including the “Free Society Papers” and a wide-ranging union training program that stressed democratic methods of organization and leadership. The training program was replicated in Hungary for the Democratic Teachers Union and new teacher unions in Romania, Bulgaria, Kosova, Albania, and Russia. Dozens of skilled staff went abroad for weeks at a time and experienced the conditions and circumstances other teachers had to deal with in these countries, thus gaining a new appreciation of the importance of the union’s international affairs work—part of the exchanging of experiences.

Education for Democracy/International became a foundational activity of the AFT international affairs department. In 1993, it prepared a Universal Framework for Teaching Democracy, which served as the basis for a new curriculum prepared by a consortium of five organizations, including the Educational Excellence Network, Freedom House, and the Center for Civic Education. The AFT also entered into an agreement with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education under the leadership of Humberto Belli to prepare a comprehensive education for democracy curriculum and training program for teachers in order to replace Sandinista textbooks. The project gained such wide acceptance that even some former Sandinista leaders, such as Carlos Timmerman, served on the project’s board of advisors.

The AFT international affairs department continued to carry out training and technical assistance programs in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and South Africa. (In Russia it lasted twelve years.) When possible, Shanker assisted the department, as in Bulgaria, where he visited representatives of the teachers’ branch of the independent Podkrepa trade union federation. And in 1994, Shanker made sure the AFT had a large delegation of election monitors for South Africa’s first free presidential election. The AFT sent 15 observers, mostly executive council members, as part of a larger AFL-CIO effort.

²⁴⁰ Reuther Library, AFT Collection, IAD, Box 9, Folders 1-11.

²⁴¹ Kulerski was appointed deputy minister of education in the fall of 1989. After leaving the ministry in 1991, he became president of the Foundation for Education for Democracy.

Inequality, Trade, and Child Labor

In the 1990s, Shanker became increasingly interested in the issues of economic inequality, globalization, fair trade, and child labor. While averse to trade restrictions generally, he had supported sanctions against dictatorships to pressure regimes on human rights. He came to believe that similar restrictions, as proposed by the AFL-CIO, were warranted for restrictions on freedom of association and the use of child labor. Not only did countries that institutionalized violations of worker rights and use of child labor undercut U.S. manufacturing, they also strengthened dictatorships and weakened democracy. As early as 1991, he raised questions about a proposed trade agreement with Mexico. In 1994, when the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) vote was approaching, he wrote another column. While he was inclined towards free trade with Mexico and Canada, he opposed the agreement based on its lack of adequate protections for worker rights standards. “We should enter into a NAFTA agreement which is modeled on the European Community but this one is not,” pointing out that poorer European countries seeking European integration had to pass strict conditions for belonging to the European Community.²⁴²

Around this time, Helen Toth, a staff member of the international affairs department since 1991, became active in the Child Labor Coalition, which raised awareness of working conditions for children in a wide range of countries, from dictatorships (Vietnam) to democracies (India), and she developed ongoing programs against child labor in Thailand and Burma. In 1996 and 1997, Shanker devoted two “Where We Stand” columns to the story of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani boy who had managed to free himself as well as 3,000 other children from bonded labor. Iqbal Masih was murdered at age 12. Toth had worked on the case, but Shanker on his own decided to devote a column to describing how tens of thousands of children work chained to their rug-making looms in “crowded, filthy, poorly lit shops that have minimal ventilation for as many as 16 hours a day, 7 days a week.”²⁴³ He publicized the efforts of the Rugmark Foundation that certifies rug makers who do not use child labor and urged readers to look for this label when buying rugs. In the second column, he reported on a Massachusetts high school class that was raising money to build “a school for Iqbal”—fulfilling his dream to provide an education for the freed child laborers. (Iqbal had been to the United States six months before his murder to receive the Reebok Human Rights Award.) For Shanker, the Massachusetts high school was a positive example of civic education: involving students in international affairs, educating them about the courage needed to stand up for human rights, and making them aware through comparison with other countries of the significance of American democratic freedoms.

Civic Education at Home

Shanker remained highly focused on how democracy was being poorly taught in American schools. He devoted fifteen “Where We Stand” columns to the subject of education for democracy in this period. In the first (“East Teaches West” on June 11, 1989), he quoted a major textbook supporting the idea that in China there is freedom because “no one ever goes hungry” and “what greater freedom is there than that?” The Tiananmen Square massacre was occurring at the time. Shanker never tired of repeating de Tocqueville’s argument that in a democracy “every generation must reinvent itself anew” and that to sustain democracy one must teach it well, including through textbooks that present the ideas and history of democracy with vitality. In a December 31, 1995, column, “Telling Our Story,” he critiques the social studies standards established as a part of Goals 2000, a national education reform initiative supported by the Clinton administration, writing,

²⁴² “Say No to NAFTA,” WWS, November 14, 1993.

²⁴³ “Knotted Rugs,” WWS, April 14, 1996.

[D]ownplaying our own political and cultural traditions, as these standards do makes them almost useless for elementary and secondary educators. Teachers are on democracy's front lines. At this turn of the New Year, let's hope they get what they need to help students understand the ideas that Americans hold in common, how those ideas grew, and why what Americans hold in common is precious.²⁴⁴

In 1995, Shanker and the international affairs department supported the establishment of an international consortium of civic educators called Civitas that was organized by the Center for Civic Education. Civitas brought together educators, non-governmental activists, and government officials dealing with civic education from new and established democracies with the aim of promoting democratic ideas and practices. At the first meeting in Prague in 1995, Shanker made the keynote speech, "Education and Democratic Citizenship: Where We Stand," which has become a foundational text in the civic education community.²⁴⁵

...

The June 1995 trip to Prague was one of Shanker's last travels. One month later, he went to Harare, Zimbabwe, to EI's first full congress. Thereafter, his ability to travel was diminished; his energies were committed to his battle against bladder cancer. He did make two final trips abroad. One, in March 1996, was for his old friend Roy Godson to a conference in Mexico on the issue of rule of law and civic education. Godson had many interests—intelligence, national security, civic education, trade union education—and his new focus was on the problem of corruption in democracies and the importance of overcoming it through rule of law and education on the rule of law to safeguard democracy. Godson studied the case of Palermo, where a democratically-elected mayor had greatly reduced the influence of the Mafia through public campaigns to foster the rule of law. He engaged AFT international affairs department director David Dorn and UFT President Sandra Feldman in a conference examining Palermo's success. The conference in Colima addressed the equally intractable problem of lawlessness resulting from corruption and violence in Mexico and the key importance of rule of law education at all levels—through the media, citizens, church, public employees, and schools—in taking on the mafia and in weakening its hold over people's minds. Showing the closeness of his relationship with Godson, Shanker agreed to attend.

Soon thereafter, in April 1996, he went to Israel for a sadder purpose, the memorial service for Shalom Levin, who had recently died. In the IFFTU, Levin was the person with whom Shanker shared the most, including a passion for involving the IFFTU in supporting democratic values. The Israel Teachers Union delayed the service so that Shanker, who was quite ill by that time, could attend. Although his health worsened, nothing would deter him from going to honor his oldest friend in the free teachers' union movement. After the service, the ITU also asked Shanker to support a last project of Levin's to create a center for the study of Jewish and universal values, which would reinforce Levin's view that Jewish values were universal and vice versa. Shanker sent the request for a contribution to the executive council.²⁴⁶

When Albert Shanker died on February 21, 1997 at age 68, he had led a full life, one that all his friends, colleagues, family, and political allies wished had been even longer and more full.

Shanker changed education in the United States. He was largely responsible for obtaining collective bargaining for most teachers. In that achievement, he gave teachers dignity and a voice on the job. In building

²⁴⁴ "Telling Our Story," WWS, December 31, 1995.

²⁴⁵ Speech to the inaugural international conference of Civitas, republished in "Resources on Civic Education for Democracy: International Perspectives, Yearbook Number Two," ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1997.

²⁴⁶ Interviews with Edith Shanker, March 16, 2012, and Fred Van Leeuwen, September 26-28, 2011; letter of A. Wen-Shabat to Albert Shanker, May 31, 1995, Reuther Library, President's Collection, Box 53/18.

one of the great modern unions in the United States, Shanker played a large part in changing the union movement to public and professional sectors. He redirected the union's strength in support of school reforms that would increase the quality of the education that children received. While certainly, he felt this last mission was unfulfilled and he would have done much more to strengthen the reform movement had he lived longer, Shanker was responsible for setting much of that movement's agenda.

Shanker also had a substantial impact on international affairs. He and the AFL-CIO's Lane Kirkland, who died soon after Shanker, in 1998, were "the last great lions of labor internationalism."²⁴⁷ Together with many other individuals mentioned in this story, they represented a liberalism rooted in trade unionism and social democracy, and an internationalism rooted in trade union solidarity. These beliefs translated also into a commitment to the free trade union movement, to democracy, to human rights, and to anti-communism, reflecting their understanding of communism as a threat to both human and worker rights.

Considering the attacks on them by the Left and the Right, both labor leaders were surprisingly effective, whether it was passing the Jackson-Vanik Amendment restricting trade with the USSR, gaining key votes for the National Endowment for Democracy, obtaining worker rights provisions in most major trade legislation, or organizing essential support for the Polish trade union movement Solidarity in Congress and in the international trade union movement.

Shanker built substantial support within the AFT for its work in supporting democracy, teacher unions, IFFTU, and worker rights. He won over the AFT leadership and membership to a commitment to labor internationalism. He was not imperious; he built support for international work within the AFT through persuasion, exposing leaders and staff to personal testimony from the victims of dictatorship, and opening the international work of the union to his leadership and membership. In doing so, he built a constituency of support for the AFL-CIO's international work and he developed a cadre for building teacher unions and supporting democracy abroad.

Those who had the opportunity to see the impact of this work on the ground had a profound and visceral understanding of its meaning. During this era, Shanker, the AFT and the AFL-CIO were in the thick of overturning dictatorships, of the Left and the Right, wherever they found them. Shanker, Kirkland, and those committed to labor internationalism understood that the central figures in all these struggles were the trade unionists and others engaged in the fight for democracy in their countries. They also knew, however, that if the AFT and AFL-CIO had taken an opposite course of action, had it been indifferent and turned its back on those movements for freedom, they probably could not have succeeded. The lack of international solidarity would have strengthened dictatorships and given them free rein to repress their people without consequence. The actions and policies of the AFT and the AFL-CIO meant a freer and more democratic world where workers had greater opportunity to organize trade unions and gain basic dignity. If these two institutions had not been led in the way they were at that time the world might look darker than it does today.

At Shanker's memorial service in Washington, D.C., Fred Van Leeuwen described the international work they had done together in IFFTU. Most of all, he described Shanker as an effective statesman for democracy and education:

[S]ince 1981, he . . . led the battles of the international teachers' community against South American dictators, communist governments in Europe, the South African apartheid regime and other non democratic forces. . . . [T]he awareness that many (if not most) teachers' organizations have today of

²⁴⁷ Letter to the editor, *Commentary*, October 1997. Former secretary-treasurer and president emeritus of the AFL-CIO, Thomas R. Donahue, deserves a share of this sobriquet. While labor internationalism has waned under current AFL-CIO leadership, Donahue has kept it alive through his Committee for Free Trade Unionism, which has focused particular attention on China, Cuba, and the Middle East. For more information on its activities, contact Lourdes Kistler at CFTU, 1025 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 712, Washington, DC 20036, Tel.: 202-293-1140.

their responsibility to help achieve democracy and human rights in all nations and to take a leading role in improving the quality and accessibility of their national education systems, that awareness is for a large part, and I say this without any hesitation, due to the intellectual and inspirational leadership of Al Shanker.²⁴⁸

German teacher union leader Dieter Wunder, a left-leaning socialist who had once opposed Shanker's reelection as IFFTU president, but who had held him in high esteem, wrote of Shanker's leadership in a condolence letter: Al, he wrote, had a "vivid personality" that was "not comparable to other people in the union movement." He continued,

What impressed me, or even influenced me, was his openness to new things. It was the first time that I met a person who had clear convictions but was nevertheless curious about new things and eager to get new knowledge and finding a point of view towards these things. That is what really impressed me. I repeatedly saw how Al Shanker successfully found an integrative path for different approaches, rejected false compromises, and instead promulgated convincing solutions. . . . He taught me a lot.²⁴⁹

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"For Al, all roads led back to democracy," said Antonia Cortese, the former AFT and NYSUT executive vice president, in an interview.²⁵⁰ Every argument or political point related to whether it promoted or hindered democracy. Every social or political movement that one belonged to should be based on how it benefited the causes of free trade unionism, civil rights, human and worker rights, anti-communism, democratic socialism (or social democracy), Israel, public education and high education quality, and equality—for Shanker these were all interconnected with democracy. The most important social movement for Shanker remained always the free trade union movement. It was through freedom of association and trade unionism that individuals could not just improve themselves economically but also gain dignity and a democratic voice. The lessons of building the teachers' union were his constant reference point and labor solidarity was the touchstone that guided his actions.

Shanker wanted AFT leaders and members to understand and embrace the principles of freedom of association, democracy, and international solidarity. He achieved that goal through open discussion, persuasive debate, respect for differences, and adherence to internal union democracy. These qualities of leadership succeeded in engaging the union on all levels in the key struggles for democracy of his era. It is a legacy that endures to this day.

²⁴⁸ Fred Van Leeuwen, Speech to Memorial Service of Albert Shanker, March [6], 1997.

²⁴⁹ "Letter of Dieter Wunder to AFT, February 26, 1997, GEW Folder, FES Archives.

²⁵⁰ Interview with Antonia Cortese, April 2, 2012.

“You think that you have lost a great American, but we have lost a great world citizen and international leader. Great men only rarely cross our paths. And we should treasure the moments that they guided us, that they kept us from going astray, that they let us share their vision.”

Fred Van Leeuwen
Memorial Service for Albert Shanker
March 6, 1997

APPENDIX I

“Where We Stand” by Albert Shanker: 1971–97 Columns on International and Democracy Themes

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|-------------|----------|--|
| 1971 | Sept. 5 | “Teachers, Unions and Politics: Some Thoughts for Labor Day,” guest column <i>by</i> Tom Kahn |
| 1972 | Feb. 20 | “A Threat to Human Rights Confronts Us Once Again: Ethnic Quotas vs. Individual Merit. Is the Question One of ‘Interpretation?’” |
| | Oct. 8 | “China’s Schools: Glowing Reports Bring Dark Reminders” |
| 1973 | July 29 | “Détente with Freedom” (announces Committee for Detente With Freedom) |
| | Aug. 26 | “The Enduring Relevance of the Labor Movement” |
| | Sept. 23 | “Soviet Détente—and Soviet Dissidents” |
| 1974 | Jan. 6 | “Humane Accountability: Japan’s Alternative Model of Industrial Relations” |
| | Apr. 4 | “How Proportional Representation Threatens Democratic Government” |
| | Dec. 29 | “UNESCO’s ‘Spiritual Abolition of Israel’” |
| | May 11 | “Refugees and the Economy: ‘Liberals’ and Labor” |
| 1975 | Apr. 6 | “The Ordeal of Anatoly Marchenko in the Struggle for Human Rights” |
| 1976 | May 16 | “British Study Gives First Hard Data About Teaching Methods” |
| | Sept. 12 | “Only Moynihan Can Defeat Buckley” |
| 1977 | Jan. 23 | “Survey Finds the Free World Shrinking” |
| | Oct. 23 | “Escapee Tells Story of China’s Schools” |
| 1978 | Feb. 19 | “New Voices of Discontent in Soviet: Workers of the U.S.S.R. Begin to Unite” |
| | Dec. 10 | “TV’s ‘Unknown War’ Distorts History: NEA Endorses Soviet Propaganda” |
| | Dec. 31 | “World Must Act to Rescue Indochina Refugees: Monumental Tragedy Ahead, Unless. . .” |

- 1979** Apr. 8 “Major Study Published in England: What the Schools Can Do ... and How”
 May 20 “A. Philip Randolph: April 15-1889–May 16, 1979”
 June 10 “Day Care: We Lag Far Behind Europe”
 July 1 “Will Civilized World Rescue the Refugees?” guest column by Bayard Rustin
 July 15 “Why Boycott Chicago—But Not Moscow”
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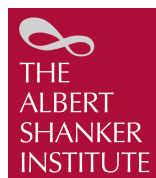
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“[T]he cause of the trade union movement was never simply a fight against communism — not withstanding all of our critics — but a fight for freedom, democracy and human rights. That fight was in the former Soviet Union, that fight was in the Philippines, that fight was in Chile, that fight is still in China and Cuba and it is today in Thailand and Haiti: that fight is anywhere trade unions and human rights are repressed. . . . ”

Albert Shanker
1991 AFL-CIO Convention

BACK COVER PHOTO: Albert Shanker greeting Nelson Mandela at the AFL-CIO headquarters in 1990, shortly after Mandela was freed from prison. At center is AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland.



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