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Blackboard Unions

The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980

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Warfare in the AFT

The effects of the depression on the AFT had been immediate and dramatic. The sudden falloff in dues from the Chicago locals and other hard-hit areas had noticeably impoverished the union. The national office was in Chicago, a city hit hard by unemployment, and when other local unions stopped paying rent in the AFT office, the secretary-treasurer, Florence Hanson, announced that the union had no money to pay for the 1932 convention. By trimming the expenses of outside speakers, locating free housing for visiting teachers, finding rent-free halls for speakers, and cutting back on the travel expenses for Executive Council members, Hanson was able to host the 1932 convention and keep the union functioning. Holding the national conventions in Chicago in the early thirties exposed teachers from all parts of the country to the impoverishing effects for teachers of the "payless paydays" in the city. At the same time the union experienced a surge of growth that began slowly in 1931 and 1932 and picked up pace until middecade, when some locals were doubling their membership. In 1934 the union had 7,500 members; by 1940 it had 32,000.¹

It was an exciting time in the union. The listless sense of marginality lifted as the economic crisis hit teachers. New members joined and organized in new patterns, promoted new ideas, and expanded on the old Progressive program. They were impatient with tired arguments between men's and women's locals, between New York socialists and Chicago conservatives, between one faction of women and another. This new blood revitalized the movement at the same time that it brought new lines of cleavage.

Most histories of the union at this stage focus on the rise to prominence of a small fraction of Communist party teachers whose presence on the Executive Council of the national brought about complete censure by the AFL,

1. AFT membership rolls, part of the AFT Collection.

near reaffiliation with the CIO, and a final bloody battle in which the union ousted three of its largest locals to rid itself of Communist "domination." The civil war within the union was profoundly ideological. What these interpretations miss is that the sound and fury reflected a deep division over the definition of unionism for public school teachers. The time had come for the union to decide if it was indeed a trade union or a pale professional reflection of the NEA. Old-timers in the union had uncomfortably clung to professionalism in asserting the meaning of teacher autonomy, while the younger generation cared little for the promised rewards of professionalism in a time of few jobs, little money, and the threat of no future. Over the course of the thirties the teachers' union gained a sense of definition, a place in the labor movement, and a firm grasp of the importance of trade unionism to their particular job.²

The depression decade was also one of the most personally costly journeys for union teachers in the AFT's history. In the old union convention delegates not only knew one another but they knew the school districts, the local and regional problems, and the particular foibles of the other delegates. All that changed rather suddenly. Old-timers gave dramatic retirement speeches at conventions, announcing that they knew they would never again be elected to attend the convention because a new faction was gaining control of the local they had founded. Late-night meetings, secret caucuses, and tricky parliamentary maneuvers replaced the old familiar letter-writing campaigns. It is important to keep in mind that the battle in the union ran from the locals, especially Local 5 in New York City, to the national level. In New York the old guard meant Henry Linville, his longtime friend Abraham Lefkowitz, and the younger Jacob Jablonower.

The substance of the dispute was ideological, but its language, impersonal style, and often brutal, always bitter, form of engagement grew out of an intense generational conflict.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the ideological and generational confrontations was that the former battles over gender receded in importance. Without disappearing, gender issues were marginalized by new divisions. Contradictions among the membership along these fissures meant that women could integrate themselves more readily into the debates, but the

2. Several books contain parts of the story of the AFT in this period. Robert W. Iverson, *The Communists and the Schools* (New York, 1959) is perhaps the most comprehensive, although it was part of a series on subversion, not on the teachers' union itself. There are two dissertations on the subject: William Edward Eaton, "The Social and Educational Position of the AFT, 1929-1941" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1971), is perhaps the best (it was published in 1975 by Southern Illinois University Press); and C. W. Miller, "Democracy in Education: A Study of How the AFT Met the Threat of Communist Subversion through the Democratic Process" (Ed.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1967). See also Celia Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union, 1916-1964: A Story of Educational and Social Commitment* (New York, 1969); and William W. Wattenberg, *On the Educational Front: The Reactions of Teachers Associations in New York and Chicago* (New York, 1936).

styles of the debates were still masculine. The ability to shout down an opponent, out-maneuver a chair, or simply stay latest at the meetings divided the men and women on purely practical grounds.

The Generation Gap in the New York Union

The generational conflict affected questions such as whether to admit WPA teachers, how to handle school finance, what aspects of the union's program to protect, and how broadly or narrowly progressive issues were conceived. It was also and most profoundly a question of style. New men and women entered the union as teachers who had waited much longer than older members to get teaching jobs. They had not been hired in the regular, long-accepted pattern. Most had spent time unemployed on the eligibility lists and then moved to substitute lists and then to permanent substitute status. Others had found teaching jobs but their schools were suddenly closed; they were unemployed and on charity when the WPA came in and started giving them paychecks.

These teachers were better educated because many had marked time in graduate school, waiting for a job. They were young but their experiences had been hard, disappointing, and often bitter. Old debates between municipal reformers, mild-mannered socialists, and AFL conservatives seemed senseless and silly to them. They would embrace Marxism in a variety of forms: communism, Trotskyism, and left socialism. The young radicals were fond of reminding the old guard that they were over the hill. In one tense moment the twenty-eight-year-old Isidore Begin told the union that Henry Linville's radical days were long behind him. "I will grant you that in 1917 and 1918 Dr. Lefkowitz was a dangerous agitator and Dr. Linville was a red Bolshevik. I will grant you that, . . . but that was twenty years ago. . . . It is not impolite to suggest that life goes right on and sometimes leaves people behind."³

John Dewey was appointed by Linville and Lefkowitz to investigate the left-wing presence in the union; in his report to the union he turned to the generational problem: "There is a certain amount of cleavage between older and young teachers, the former feeling that they have the wisdom of maturity and the latter feeling that age tends to become conservative and that youth brings in new vigor and fresh blood for more energetic and vital activity."⁴ Dewey could not resist reprimanding Isidore Begin, his old student and a

3. Proceedings of the 29 April 1933 meeting of Local 5, New York City, pp. 17-41, in the Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051, Cornell Labor School Archives, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. See also the collection of the Teachers' Guild, unprocessed files, Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

4. "Report of the Dewey Committee," p. 1, Guild Collection (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

leading spokesman for the young radicals: "I have no desire to add to any of the personal element in the situation but I do regret that I was not more successful with my pupil." The admonition was too tempting for the fiery Begin to resist. He told the union audience that he too was disappointed that the professor who had taught him about liberalism had failed to live up to his classroom ideals. "It is with great regret that I see a former teacher of mine, who taught me about democracy in education and liberalism, signing this report." The generational animus kept pace with the ideological disputes.⁵

The old guard, or "the administration" as younger members called Linville and Lefkowitz, were chiefly concerned with protecting professional prerogatives, especially the established certification program. As noted in the last chapter, New York City was only hiring substitute teachers and paying them little more than half the salary of regular teachers. Substitutes were hired casually without reference checks and without having to take the standard examinations. In some of the larger high schools, substitutes made up more than half of the teaching force. How should the union deal with them? Linville and Lefkowitz argued with city and state officials that only properly credentialed teachers should be employed. Younger activists, however, wanted substitute teachers to be declared permanent substitutes with all the rights to sick leave, pensions, and retirement that regular teachers had. They also wanted the substitute teachers in the union as regular voting members, a practice that had been avoided in most local unions. The issue of substitute teachers became a constant wrangle until the "administration" finally relented and tried to distinguish between permanent substitute teachers and casual substitutes, a practice that opened the door for legislative change. Substitute teachers came into the union and chose factions, usually opposed to the old guard.⁶

There was a similar divergence over WPA teachers, who were mostly young teachers with little experience in the system. WPA teachers were largely adult-education teachers, although some taught kindergarten and special education. According to Harry Hopkins these teachers were not expected to teach classes in the regular school curriculum, but distinguishing between classes was difficult. Like substitute teachers, WPA teachers were not subject to certification requirements. Linville and Lefkowitz tried in vain to have the WPA put under the administrative control of the city's Board of Examiners. They were loathe to allow the new teachers into their union, but again younger members pointed out that WPA teachers were often unemployed teachers on the school eligibility list. Soon both Linville and Lefkowitz were urging school administrators to hire eligibility-list teachers, and by

5. Proceedings of the 29 April 1933 meeting, Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051.

6. Daniel Paul Higgins, Commissioner, Board of Education, "Report on Substitute Teachers," New York City Board of Education, Millbank Library, Special Collections, Columbia University; also Minutes of Local 5, September 1934, Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051; Oral History of Jacob Jablonower, Walter Reuther Archives, Detroit.

that argument they opened the doors of the union again to a young and militant constituency. WPA teachers swelled the union's ranks with young people who, like the substitute teachers, mostly opposed the leadership of the "administration."⁷

Although both Linville and Lefkowitz won office by a sizable majority, the newer generation was soon running for office and gaining a foothold on the union's executive board. Exasperated by bitter arguments, wrangling over leadership and policy questions, and long meetings, Lefkowitz proposed in 1934 that the union not accept any new members. The desire to hold off growth at a moment when teachers were joining in record numbers appeared to the young and ambitious new members a foolish and self-destructive policy. To the older members it was a precaution. In the old days membership growth was slow; prospective members were nominated by insiders, and individual cases were discussed: where did the teacher teach, was he/she permanent or temporary, what kind of certificate did he/she hold? In the early thirties there were thirty to forty new members per meeting, and it became impossibly time-consuming to check each one. Lefkowitz and Linville argued that they had to maintain professional standards; the young left accused them of foot-dragging.⁸

Younger teachers also maintained that the economic situation called for reforms in teaching methods. Rejecting the division between the community and professional, an idea that the young Columbia Teachers College professor George Counts was developing, the new generation found that more and more working-class children attended high schools looking for an education that addressed their job needs. The high schools were either teaching redundant skills in areas where students knew there were no jobs or college preparatory courses.

Few cities had had community colleges or junior colleges, and in the depression these rare programs were discontinued as "luxury" items in city school budgets. The children of the depression, characterized by hopelessness and anxiety, evoked sympathy among younger teachers whose own recent experiences in the job market had proved disappointing. Progressive education as embraced by the prewar generation contained the liberal promise of social mobility and progress. For these younger teachers, however, it was difficult to embrace fully John Dewey's Progressive Era optimism. Instead, they added to Dewey's educational idealism a Marxist class analysis, which they learned at the unemployment rallies, study groups, and parties sponsored by the Communist party. The focus of the new teacher in the thirties was the community and the teacher as an empowering agent,

7. Adult Education, Board of Education Archives, Millbank Library, Columbia University; "Minutes," Teachers' Guild Collection (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

8. Minutes of Local 5, Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051; see also Henry Linville, "Communists at Work," mimeographed, Henry Linville Collection, Boxes 1, 14.

bringing to the masses, including students and parents, class analysis of education which rejected the potentially elitist characteristic of professionalism.

With the enthusiasm of beginners, the new teachers sought solutions in the union and were often rebuffed by what seemed to them the narrow trade union interests of the old guard or the "administration." Communist teachers, who long stood on the fringes of the union, recognized an organizing potential. Originally the Communist party viewed students as the primary target for organization and saw the professional goals of the union as largely irrelevant to the class struggle. The influx of new recruits and new unionists promised a change in party policy and, in part because of the changes in the trade union movement generally during the Roosevelt years, the party began to view the teachers' union as an important aspect of its program.

The generational split also affected questions of what concessions to make to budget-conscious school authorities. Old-guard teachers had fought hard for pensions, tenure laws, and professional standards, and they were ready to fight to keep them. To the younger teachers the overriding issues were salary and the number of jobs. The two groups seemed to be speaking different languages.⁹

The Radical Attraction of the AFT

The AFT was attractive to young idealists precisely because of its old gadfly reputation and its positions on a broad range of social issues. The issues were changing but the union had already built a foundation for furthering social justice. For example, the union had opposed an Office of Education bill because it had provisions for military training in the schools. The union affiliated with international peace groups and sent regular delegates to international conferences concerned with disarmament and world peace. To many it seemed a small step from the old union program to the new radicalism of the depression era. Some of the old-guard even welcomed these newcomers for their spirit and fight. Mary Barker, at her last convention, took a brave stand in favor of a resolution defending the Scottsboro boys. Margaret Haley, who was slowly dying of heart disease, expressed her approval of the young Communists. "Class consciousness is what we missed in our organizing work," she concluded.¹⁰

Although the voice of youth may have seemed sweet and daring to Margaret Haley in Chicago and Mary Barker in Atlanta, it was a deafening roar in the ears of Linville and Lefkowitz. The old guard had grown ac-

9. Linville, "Communists at Work," pp. 266-68.

10. Margaret Haley's autobiography; Mary Barker to Florence Hanson, 23 May 1934, Correspondence of the Financial Secretary, AFT Collection.

customed to reporting legislative victories and bargaining gains at general membership meetings, but young members wanted mass demonstrations, mass rallies, and open-air meetings to dramatize, publicize, and mobilize for further action. One mass demonstration called at City Hall was disrupted when Linville and Lefkowitz came out of the mayor's office to announce cuts that the Board of Education was imposing on teachers. Instead of denouncing the city for the 8.3 percent pay cut proposed by the mayor, the crowd turned on Linville and Lefkowitz and blamed them for participating in a sellout.¹¹

The same issue arose in Chicago, but the factionalism there was much more blatantly a generational issue and not ideological. Young John Fewkes had organized an extra-union organization consisting of teachers from various unions, and he had promoted parades in the downtown Loop area. Fewkes's Volunteer Emergency Committee drew several thousand teachers to dramatize the city's payless paydays. Fewkes lost badly when he ran for office in the Chicago Men's High School Local at the time of the parades, but his presence was felt by the old guard; for all of their distaste for his tactics, he was a man who commanded thousands of teachers. Older men in the local—Charles Stillman, Freeland Stecker, and James Meade—met with city officials to discuss pay and had the unhappy job of reporting the bad news to the teachers. Their dull-sounding reports culminated in the depressing news that teachers would not get paid; Fewkes had few concrete answers, but, Margaret Haley reported, he could lead a parade in evangelical prayer and arouse members' hatred toward the banking interests that held all the cards. He appealed to the younger teachers whose anger could not be assuaged by Charles Stillman's reasoned pronouncements.¹²

Key Players in the Left Revolt

The generational split was complicated by the fact that the new left-wingers were not all of a piece. At the time that Linville was first noticing the presence of Communists in his local in 1927, the American Communist party was undergoing an upheaval in which two separate factions in the leadership would be expelled. James P. Cannon and other followers of the purged Soviet leader Leon Trotsky were expelled in 1928. Six months later the party expelled its former national leader Jay Lovestone, whose influence in New York was potent. Linville and Lefkowitz then faced not one group of "reds" but four: the regular Communist party faction; the Lovestonite faction, which was led in the union by its major theorist, Bertram Wolfe; the Trots-

11. Guild Papers, unprocessed files, Robert Wagner Archives, New York University; Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051.

12. CTF Collection, Box 67.

kyites, who were only a handful in the early thirties but led a militant attack on the Communists in 1937 and again after Trotsky's murder in 1940; and the Musteites, a left-socialist grouping led by A. J. Muste, an ex-minister. Not knowing who was in which faction or even understanding that the factions were bitter enemies, Linville and Lefkowitz pitted their mild-mannered municipal socialism against sophisticated Marxist arguments and often lost. What was more disturbing was that often the response to the Communist party line by other factions was to bid up the level of militancy and thereby increase the pressure on the "administration." The Communist party had its own Rank and File Caucus, which included Williana Burroughs, Isidore Begin, and, much later, Bella Dodd and Dale Zysman. A Lovestonite faction split off from the Communist faction and included Bertrand Wolfe and Simon Beagle. Other groups amalgamated into the Progressive Caucus. Each faction organized an unemployed teachers group, each faction demanded more militancy for teachers, and each faction denounced the others at meetings.¹³

Although these factions caused a certain disruption in the union, they were responsible for some positive changes as well. They brought in new energy, new militancy, and a broadened social consciousness. The Communist party, indifferent to the largely professional goals of the teachers' union leadership, was most active in pursuing alliances with parent and community groups. Projects in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem were particularly successful. In 1935 the Communist party successfully launched the Harlem Committee for Better Schools, a coalition of parents' associations, churches, community groups, and teacher-union members. The committee had access to the mayor's office through the Reverend John W. Robinson of the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem and began to agitate for better schools independently of Local 5. The committee succeeded in getting two new schools built in Harlem in 1938, a remarkable achievement at that time. In Chicago, by way of contrast, angry black students in the Lilydale community burned the temporary buildings they attended when more peaceful protests were ignored.¹⁴

Left-wing teacher-union activists were also concerned with the content of educational materials in the schools and accomplished a great deal in broadening the narrowly racist curriculum of the time. Communist party teachers worked with the Committee on Better Schools in Harlem to remove racist books from the schools. Alice Citron was a pioneer in this work, writing plays dramatizing themes in black history, compiling bibliographies on black history, and agitating for the celebration of Negro History Week in the schools. Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and others worked closely with

13. Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984), pp. 15–21; interview with Simon Beagle, summer 1974.

14. Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (New York, 1983), pp. 214–16; Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920–1941* (Urbana, Ill., 1984), pp. 65–78.

teacher-union activists in providing material and speakers for the project. In the Bedford-Stuyvesant community a similar project pushed for reduction of class size, better school buildings, and an end to the system of permanent substitutes.¹⁵

Teachers in both projects expressed frustration with the union leadership, which seemed to focus on the city's most elite high schools. They were sympathetic to black and ethnic frustrations over declining educational services, many of them having experienced ethnic harassment in their own educational history. Allying with black teachers, they impressed community workers with their dedication to the children and the community. Frustrated with the slowness of Henry Linville's leadership, the activist teachers thought nothing of creating their own union within the union and conducting separate negotiations on affairs for their community. With the teachers' union in their control, after 1935, teachers in both projects were able to welcome in WPA teachers, whose community projects in adult education enhanced the two community projects. "When Henry Linville left," Mildred Flacks, a Bedford-Stuyvesant teacher recalled, "we had our own union."¹⁶

Although Communist party teachers would remain active in school and community affairs until the fifties, the investigation of teachers by the Rapp-Coudert Committee in 1940, the 1940-41 crisis in the AFT, and finally the Communist party's growing preoccupation with foreign affairs in the forties weakened its community alliance. The demise of the WPA further weakened the union's base in the community. The perspective of community organizing never died for a few dedicated teachers who maintained their contacts until they were kicked out of teaching in the fifties. As one community member recalled, "Most of the teachers who they said were Communists and kicked out of the school system were much more dedicated to teaching black children the way out of the crucible of American life than the teachers we now have. When they left, Harlem became a worse place. They stayed after school with the children and gave them extra curricular attention to bring them up to level. You didn't have these reading problems like you have today. These people were dedicated to their craft." Seeking an alternative vision in the direction of teacher unionism, these teachers revived the original vision of unionism as Jennie McKeon saw it. They ignored, however, the powerful influence of professionalism in this vision.¹⁷

The negative side was that the policy of the Communist party often had nothing to do with the welfare of teachers or of the AFT but rather with the

15. Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, pp. 238-51; leaflet by the Rank and File Caucus, January 1934, 9 April and 14 June 1934, in the Teachers' Union Collection, Series 5051. See also minutes of Local 5 meeting, 23 April 1934, and leaflets in the Teachers' Union Collection, 74/4A, Series 5051; Linville "Communists at Work," pp. 259-75 (pages variously renumbered); Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, pp. 214-17.

16. Interview with Mildred and David Flacks, summer 1988; "Undemocratic Rulings and Restrictive Regulations," Teachers' Union Collection, 74/4a, Series 5051.

17. Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, p. 216; Zitron, *New York City Teachers Union*.

working class as the Communist party leadership saw it. For example, in 1936, when a great many teacher unionists wanted to join the CIO, the party opposed the idea because the leadership felt the party needed a foot in the door of the AFL, and the AFT would be that entree.

In fact the real issue for teachers in the controversy between the CIO and the AFL was the question of local support. For years, citywide federations, or labor councils, provided teachers' unions with support in both legislative and school-board matters. Often a well-placed labor representative on the board of education could save teachers' jobs and protect their rights. CIO councils were too new and too weak to provide such protection. Nevertheless, the energy of the CIO and its vocal support of teacher unionism was certainly an attractive alternative to the bitter past of union affiliation. None of these considerations entered into the Communist party formulation of the problem, for the party wanted an overall strategy for workers and tended, like William Green, to dismiss teacher needs lightly. Such calculations ignored the welfare of the teachers as workers.¹⁸

From Local 5 to the National

In the fall of 1932 Linville, Lefkowitz, and Jablonower appointed a commission headed by Linville's friend John Dewey to assess the causes of, and cure for, factionalism within the union. Dewey offered his report at a raucous meeting in April 1933 at which he tangled with his young former student Isidore Begin. Linville had two objectives for this meeting. He wanted Begin and Bertram Wolfe out of the union, and he wanted a delegate assembly, a representative body of teachers instead of the freewheeling bring-out-the-vote-and-pack-the-meeting style he was currently directing. The meeting was an intense affair with a two-hour wrangle over the agenda. Begin, whom Jablonower described as "a very dynamic person, a very able speaker and one very quick to see the vulnerable points in the position that you took or the course you espoused," and Wolfe, whom Jablonower called "a man who is as well read as anyone I've ever met, a man who has achieved high standing as a writer and a scholar," took to the floor to defend themselves and the militant tactics they espoused. Linville said at the time that he was glad Dewey was there because he knew the young militants had angered the philosopher as much as they had exasperated the union president. But despite their years of trade-union experience, Lefkowitz and Linville were no match for the young Communists. After the union voted for the suspen-

18. Proceedings of 29 April 1933, Teachers' Union Collection, 74/12, Series 5051; Celia Lewis and William J. McCoy, "Shall We Affiliate with the CIO—A Forum for Union Members," *American Teacher*, 22 (September–October 1937), pp. 12–14; responses in *American Teacher*, 22 (November–December 1937), p. 12; 22 (January–February 1938), pp. 14–15; 22 (March–April 1938), pp. 26–27; 22 (May–June 1938), pp. 24–28.

sions, Linville wanted to call the question of the delegate assembly, but the Communists quickly fielded a motion to adjourn, which the confused Lefkowitz seconded. A motion to adjourn always takes precedence over ordinary business. The angry Linville then called the delegate-assembly question, and of course there was great confusion about which motion had been called, but Linville went ahead and declared that the delegate-assembly motion had passed despite the fact that some unionists thought the meeting had adjourned. Calls of "point of order!" ended the stenographic report on this chapter in the union's history.¹⁹

Never before had Henry Linville sacrificed democratic procedure to gain a programmatic change, but this time he seemed to have moved beyond reason. Years later when the national union ousted the young, radical leadership, similar breaches in union democracy were committed for the sake of what was thought to be the best interest of the union. Linville was a changed man as a result of the fight against communism in his union. In his mind, it became the most important aspect of his union career, completely overshadowing his earlier radical dreams expressed in the *American Teacher*. In the next year, when the factionalism continued and when he lost the presidency of the AFT to new leadership, he became convinced that the only way to rid his local of his enemies was to call on the national to oust the Communists.²⁰

Politics in the national organization had changed so rapidly in the early thirties that when Linville called for help from the national his only wholehearted ally was Selma Borchardt, the AFT's lobbyist in Washington, who was regarded within the union as ineffective. Florence Hanson was strongly opposed to any efforts to purge the left within the union and was a factional opponent of Linville and Borchardt. Younger women in Chicago like Mary Herrick were not impressed with Borchardt's record and remained distant from Linville. These relationships would greatly retard the opposition to the radical faction in years to come.²¹

Hanson was ill and tired, but she was moving further to the left in her last years. Having taught in Chicago and come to leadership in the feminist and somewhat socialist women high school teachers' local, Hanson wanted to reshape the union into a progressive force that would attract young, idealistic socialists to the movement to reenergize it. She recruited University of Chicago socialist Mayard Krueger and through his influence was able to organize a number of active socialist unions in the Ohio Valley region. These young leaders seemed to put new energy into the old municipal socialist

19. Linville, "Communists at Work," pp. 260-75; "Minutes, April 19 Meeting," Guild Papers (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

20. Henry R. Linville to Selma Borchardt, 30 October 1939, and Selma Borchardt to Henry R. Linville, 16 November 1939, Borchardt Collection, 125/9, Walter Reuther Archives, Detroit (see also various letters in Box 88).

21. *AFT Proceedings*, 1933, AFT Collection, Series 13 7/2, pp. 98-108.

ideas of the early federation movement. Raymond Lowry of Toledo was the chief proponent of this new unionism and explained his strategy for successfully organizing several thousand Ohio teachers in one year. "We thought that perhaps making a quiet program of search into the tax books might help a bit to let them know who in the city of Toledo paid their taxes," the young Lowry explained to the 1934 convention. He found that the poorer families had paid up, but it was the wealthy and corporate "tax owners" who were holding out 13.5 million dollars in unpaid taxes. The Toledo local broadcast this information on a friendly radio station and in editorials and found that in the first week seven hundred thousand dollars in delinquent taxes were turned in at the county courthouse. Lowry's story captivated the convention as did the story of the rural Arkansas teachers who said they had been inspired to unionize when they saw that their schools were closed while firehouses remained open because the firemen had a union. Linville and Borchardt very much resented Hanson's new recruits to the union, but they could not stem the tide of enthusiasm that carried Lowry into office as the next union president.²²

With Hanson about to retire, Linville attended the 1935 convention with the firm intention of getting the Executive Council and the convention to oust the Communists from his local. He might have succeeded except that before Lowry brought up the question he read a telegram from AFL president William Green that urged the convention to act immediately to oust the Communists from New York's Local 5.²³ A rumor spread that the AFL would revoke the AFT's charter unless the convention voted to expel the Communists. Green's intervention, however, had the opposite effect. The old union dug in its heels and refused to accommodate labor's chief. Linville was beside himself in fury and stalked out of the convention hall with the Chicago, Washington, and Seattle locals in tow.²⁴ Linville immediately began planning a mass resignation of officers of Local 5 and the creation of a totally unaffiliated organization, the New York City Teachers' Guild.²⁵

The Radicalization of the AFT

Discussion of the CIO and its meaning for labor, especially for the American Federation of Teachers, encouraged more progressive teachers to seek out the union and build its organization. The 1936 convention brought a

22. *AFT Proceedings*, 1935, AFT Collection, Series 13 8/1, pp. 213-48.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 535.

24. Papers of the New York Teachers Guild (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University; see also the correspondence between Linville and Borchardt in the same collection.

25. "Report on the 1936 AFL Convention," Mary Grossman Papers, Urban History Archives, Temple University Philadelphia; Guild Papers (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

whole new contingent of WPA teachers, who participated actively in the convention and brought new leaders into the Executive Council. These teachers were excited about CIO-style industrial unionism and pressed the convention to investigate the possibility of joining with the industrial unionists in a new trade-union movement. Even old-time delegates pointed to the disappointing results the AFT had achieved with the AFL in federal aid legislation. It seemed that new labor legislation systematically discriminated against public employees. Teachers declared that they wanted to be included under the Wagner Act, a move they thought would disenfranchise the NEA as a company union. They also wanted to be under Social Security, provided they could have their city and state pensions protected and extend the protection to rural teachers who had no protections. To this end they elected Mary Foley Grossman as the new legislative representative and booted Selma Borchardt.²⁶

Relations between the AFT and the AFL reached an all-time low in 1936. The AFL had refused to hire new organizers for the AFT, had refused to send out women organizers, and had not helped teachers who were unemployed. Instead, Green, following Selma Borchardt's scenario, appointed a three-member investigating committee to look into Local 5 in the spring of 1936. As expected, the committee recommended that the AFT oust the local and put in new leadership in New York. But, keeping the CIO split in mind, the committee held back from recommending that the AFL step in if the AFT union failed to act. "We've been double-crossed," Borchardt declared, but she was only thinking of her own internal struggle, not of the entire labor picture at the time.²⁷

Green intensified his pressure on the union in 1937 to rid itself of "reds" and openly expressed his contempt for Jerome Davis, the Yale University theology professor who succeeded Lowry as AFT president in 1936 and who had the forlorn hope of patching the split between the AFL and the CIO. Finally, in 1939 Matthew Woll issued a statement from the AFL Executive Committee declaring that the AFL believed the AFT was Communist-led and hinting that the charter would be withdrawn. Again, AFT conservatives and radicals reacted in uniform anger. John Fewkes demanded an apology from Woll and a clarification from Green stating that the AFT was not under investigation and that it was a legitimate organization. Green publicly said the statement was incorrect and no investigation was underway, but he reminded the union that if it had kept its own house in order such a misstatement would not have occurred. Perhaps the reason conservatives in the union responded so angrily was that they had launched a secret movement to unseat the radicals, and it was in a very delicate early stage. Green's interference threatened a repeat of the 1935 fiasco.²⁸

26. Borchardt to John Frey, 29 April 1936, Borchardt Collection, 88/16.

27. Telegram, John Fewkes to Matthew Woll, 8 February 1939, CTU Collection, 6/8; Guild Papers, Robert Wagner Library.

28. Guild Papers (unprocessed files), Robert Wagner Archives, New York University.

Secret negotiations had begun as early as 1935 when Henry Linville left the union, but the CIO split and the cold response of AFL unions toward Linville's Teachers' Guild had slowed any action within the union. Linville and Lefkowitz, helped along by the New York State Federation of Labor president, George Meany, were able to get a new labor affiliation for the Teachers' Guild. Even though they could not themselves oust New York's Local 5 they could continue to encourage others inside the union who would.²⁹

Selma Borchardt was one of the main leaders in the ouster of Local 5, although she did not have the temperament to think out a national plan. Borchardt was angry at being replaced by Mary Foley Grossman, whom she accused of following the NEA and its racist approach to a federal aid bill. In 1936, she wanted to oppose the election of Davis because he clearly represented the radical faction, but she could not bring herself to support Davis's opponent, Allie Mann, the young activist who had replaced Mary Barker in Atlanta. Borchardt charged that Mann was a racist and reactionary and was using the Communist leadership issue as a way to gain office. She said that Mann had prevented Mary Barker from becoming a delegate for the Atlanta local because Mann disapproved of her brave defense of the Scottsboro case and her fight against racism. Mann, Borchardt insisted, had played to the lowest form of racism on these questions. Borchardt voted for Davis, as did many municipal socialists, and the new radical group gained leadership.³⁰

Davis's CIO-leaning leadership did not please the pro-AFL Chicago locals, however, and in 1937 Chicago women and men joined forces to produce a new amalgamated local consisting of high school and elementary teachers, women and men. The new organization had 5,000 members and quickly gained 2,000 more with amalgamation; it had 8,500 members by 1940. By surpassing the membership of Local 5, which had 6,500 but was losing members in the WPA locals, Chicago teachers expected to be able to name the new AFT president in 1938. Having taken on the local designation of Margaret Haley's old CTF, Chicago Teachers' Union Local 1 elected Jack Fewkes as its first president. On the national level the local prepared the way to elect Lillian Hernstein as president of the AFT. Hernstein represented much of what the old union had to offer with respect to social justice and the limits of reform.³¹

Although Hernstein's candidacy was fielded as a distinct alternative to Davis and the radicals, she was also to symbolize the modern spirit of growth that the Chicago local felt it had attained by following a conservative leadership and sticking with the AFL. But the New York City local was hardly cowed by the success of the Chicagoans. Local 5 was still growing

29. See letters from Selma M. Borchardt to Frederick Ringdahl, 21 July 1938 and 22 November 1938, and Mary Herrick to Selma Borchardt, 1 July 1938, Borchardt Collection, 89/1.

30. Selma M. Borchardt to Florence (unknown), 18 September 1938, Borchardt Collection, 88/18.

31. *AFT Proceedings*, 1938, AFT Collection, Series 13, pp. 638-660, 733.

and it had gained substantial victories in the state legislature, notably passage of a bill that gave substitute teachers tenure rights and limited their numbers. At the convention, the young Italian-born lobbyist Bella Dodd exuded the sophistication of a Hunter College professor and the sincere compassion of a determined Communist organizer. As the legislative representative of Local 5, she dramatically led floor fights for progressive legislation. She was young, smart, successful, and dynamic. It seemed that Hernstein would not measure up to the younger Dodd. Hernstein's defeat was not a surprise. In her concession speech she made an eloquent plea for unity, declared that the convention had operated with some degree of harmony despite disagreements, and congratulated Davis on his success.³²

The Triumph of the Conservatives

Although Local 5 appeared to have met the Chicago challenge at the national convention, all was not well within the politics of the local. Local 5 was kicked out of the New York City Trades Council in 1938 for participating in a CIO conference in the city and for charges, brought by Local 24, of raiding. Disaffiliation with the state organization followed, and in Albany a legislative committee was formed—ostensibly to investigate the finances of the New York City school system but, in actuality, to investigate communism in New York City public schools. The Rapp-Coudert Committee hearings consumed the time and energy of Local 5 and turned its attention away from national politics. The national opponents of Local 5 were then free to organize a comeback in 1939.³³

The 1939 convention was scheduled to be held in Buffalo for the sole reason that the AFT insisted on having fully integrated facilities for its delegates and would not tolerate the least suggestion of special treatment of minority members. Buffalo, everyone agreed, was a city that was relatively inexpensive and open to all delegates. Although these issues were symbolic gestures of defiance against segregation, they were still costly and indicative of the generally progressive tenor of the entire convention. The issues in the 1939 convention were not as progressive. In the battle to gain a new seat on the Executive Council, conservatives ran a new black candidate for the delegate-at-large position, a seat generally regarded as the minority seat since 1936. Doxey Wilkerson, a Howard University professor, was being challenged by Layle Lane, a New York City high school teacher. In Harlem, Socialist Layle Lane, along with A. Philip Randolph and Frank Crosswaithe, were working toward the complete exclusion of Communists in civil rights

32. Bella Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York, 1954), pp. 75–78; Teachers' Union Collection, 58, Series 5051; Iverson, *Communists*, pp. 38–41.

33. *AFT Proceedings*, 1939, AFT Collection, Series 13, pp. 470–529; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, p. 287.

activities. At the convention, the Communists did not attack Lane directly but charged that her challenge was an old tactic to pit one black against another, but Lane managed to be recognized and pointedly told the audience that she hoped people would not vote for either herself or Doxey Wilkerson because they were black but because they were ideologically on two sides of the issues. In this debate the issues were clearly drawn, and it seemed at the time that Wilkerson had the support of a majority of the black delegates at the convention. But Wilkerson's strength tended to conceal the weakness of the radicals.³⁴

The issue of fascism and the treatment of European Jews seemed to divide the radicals while it oddly played into the hands of the conservatives. The year before, Lillian Hernstein's loss to Jerome Davis had been largely attributed to the anti-Semitism of Atlanta Local 189 and the leadership of Allie Mann. Selma Borchardt claimed that the Communists had allied with the bigots in the union to defeat Hernstein. Perhaps it was for this reason that Jerome Davis planned his opening speech to address the growing threat of anti-Semitism to European Jews and express his dismay that the same reactionary forces seemed to be gaining momentum in the United States. It was perhaps indicative of Davis's bad timing throughout his tenure of office that on the eve of the 1939 convention the Stalin-Hitler pact was announced. It threw the entire convention into an uproar. Communist delegates did not know how to respond, while their enemies were quick to argue that they were not thinking for themselves. Layle Lane pointed out that the Soviet alliance was evidence that communism was an evil that needed to be purged from black life. The large number of Jewish delegates were appalled by the breakup of the antifascist alliance and the Communist party's sudden switch to the peace issue. Davis went ahead and made his address, which pointed to world fascism as the greatest threat to democracy the world over.³⁵

Meanwhile, conservatives in the union were ready to make a new counteroffensive against the radicals by proposing George Counts for president. Counts was a Teachers College professor, founding member of the New York City College Teachers' local, and one of the stalwart unionists who refused to leave the AFT with Linville but resented the rise to leadership of the Communist party in Local 5. Counts had completed a study of education in the Soviet Union during the era of the Stalin purges and had become somewhat of an expert on the disappointments of communism. His firm leadership of the union represented a new force, one that could match Jerome Davis's Ivy League image, project the old liberalism of the union, and yet renounce strongly the Communist party. He was thoroughly versed in the practical problems of the union and promised nothing on the question of communism in the union but focused instead on organization. He also

34. Interview with Beagle; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, p. 292.

35. *AFT Proceedings*, 1939, AFT Collection, Series 13 12/7, pp. 506-29.

claimed that he could work with all factions as he had in New York and that Davis was incapable of getting any cooperation from the Chicago or Washington locals. Selma Borchardt had sabotaged a national conference Davis had called, and largely because of her efforts he was not able to get much cooperation from the AFL. Counts was given pledges of cooperation from most sections of the country, and he seemed conciliatory toward the radicals.³⁶ As it turned out, the news of the Stalin-Hitler Pact provided a sufficient backlash vote to unseat Jerome Davis. But Counts's margin was narrow, and the radicals were still very much in charge of the Executive Board.³⁷

The Communist party did not see Davis's defeat as a major setback. Davis was proving to be a liability, and although the Communists had no respect for Counts, they had reason to believe changes to the AFT constitution would prevent any offensive Counts and the AFL might attempt against them. Two amendments, which passed by a two-thousand-vote margin, seemed to make it impossible to discriminate against radicals. In the first, Article III Section 9, the convention ratified the idea that no discrimination could ever be shown individual members because of race, religious faith, or political activities or beliefs. The second required a two-thirds ratification by the convention to suspend or revoke the charter of any local except for nonpayment of dues. These constitutional guarantees, the mutual sense that Davis had little more to give the union, and the general distractions of the Dies Committee (House Un-American Activities Committee, founded in 1938) in Washington and the Rapp-Coudert Committee in New York caused the radicals to ignore the growing movement against them.³⁸

In the next year, however, Counts moved to organize the opposition to Local 5. He succeeded in secretly negotiating with the Progressive Caucus within the local and arranged for their affiliation with the Teachers' Guild in New York. He spoke with William Green about getting national organizers, the financial resources and full support of the AFL for an ouster of Local 5. Selma Borchardt had Green appoint two AFL organizers specifically under Counts's direction to help organize against the Communists. The organizers worked to bring in new small locals from the South and West pledged to opposing Communists in the union. The tactic was similar to the charge made against Florence Hanson in 1935 by Linville, who said she packed the meeting to prevent the ouster of Communists from his local. Counts also wanted to revise the constitution to block the inroads made by the left. Mary Herrick and others had failed to alter the constitution in 1939, but by 1940 they had gained considerable experience in getting amendments through the

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 727–34; Jerome Davis Papers, University of Oregon.

37. *AFT Proceedings*, 1939, AFT Collection, Series 13 12/7, p. 723.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 723–24.

convention. They were aiming at endorsing a pledge that the union would exclude "communists and fascists" from the membership and that the Executive Council could recommend the ouster of locals. At first this work began clandestinely, but by 1940 the conservatives were operating quite openly and confidently.³⁹

Rebirth of the Red Scare and Defeat of the Radicals

The secrecy of the campaign against the radicals in the union was a big issue dividing the more conservative forces. Mary Herrick, a regional vice-president from Chicago Teachers' Union Local 1, had supported Mary Foley Grossman against Selma Borchardt in 1936 because she liked the progressive politics that Grossman promoted and she was suspicious of Borchardt's rabid anticommunism. This was a sentiment shared by many in the union who felt that Borchardt's views encouraged the antiteacher, anti-union sentiments of the right. Several events seemed to support this argument. First, Representative Martin Dies of Texas began his committee (HUAC) to investigate both right and left movements in the United States by specifically aiming at the AFT and calling Henry Linville in 1939 to testify about communism in the teachers' union. Many unionists were in an uproar over the unfavorable publicity Linville's testimony gave the union.

The investigation had itself been encouraged by an announcement of the AFL executive committee through Matthew Woll in February 1939 that the AFL was considering ousting the AFT unless the union cleaned house of all Communists. Green later clarified the statement, but even the most conservative John Fewkes of the Chicago Teachers' Union sent strong letters of protest to Green in which he wrote that these attacks were having some effect on the union. Finally, in the autumn of 1939 an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* informed the magazine's three million subscribers that the AFT was a "red" union. In this atmosphere many AFT conservatives, especially the old socialists, were afraid to engage in an open battle with the Communists. Others like Selma Borchardt and John Fewkes proposed to assail the Communists openly, and called in the AFL and the press to witness their fight against evil. The split in strategy meant that at first the campaign was launched secretly and was not thoroughly successful. The election of Counts, however, seemed to unite all factions. Counts wrote secretly to every "safe" local officer to encourage them to send delegates to the 1940 convention or send proxies to other "safe" leaders with open instructions to fight the

39. Ben Stolberg, "Communist Wreckers in American Labor," *Saturday Evening Post*, 2 September 1939; Borchardt Collection, 125/9. See also George Counts to Jack Fewkes, 7 September 1939; Fewkes to William Green, 26 June 1939; Green to Fewkes, 8 August 1939; Matthew Woll to Fewkes, 9 February 1939; Green to Fewkes, 9 February 1939; all in the CTU Collection, 6/8.

Communists. Borchardt's own Local 8 came with such instructions, as did hundreds of other small locals or their proxies.⁴⁰

The leaders in Local 5 were under increasing fire at the same time to turn over membership lists to the Rapp-Coudert Committee. Over thirty college teachers were suspended from their jobs as a result of the hearings; membership was down, and it looked as if a national investigation of communism in the schools would soon be under way. The country had moved in a conservative direction, and Local 5 was able to accomplish very little either nationally or locally.⁴¹

In 1940, AFT secretary-treasurer Irvin Kuenzli reported that despite the *Post* article, despite the Dies Committee headlines, and despite the various right-wing attacks against the union, the AFT had maintained its membership during the year. The WPA locals had declined dramatically from forty-six chartered since 1936 to the dwindling dozen that remained in 1940; membership in the WPA section went from two thousand to five hundred in a year. But regular classroom teachers joined the union, bringing the total membership up to thirty-five thousand.⁴²

The tone and direction of the 1940 AFT convention, known to old-timers as the second battle of Buffalo, was set early by a major address from AFL president William Green. "I urge you to put your house in order. If there is one union that ought to make a declaration on Americanism, that is susceptible of but one interpretation, and that is loyalty and devotion to our public schools, to our free democratic institutions, to the Declaration of Independence, and to our own country against all others, it is this union here."⁴³ He went on to argue that the union would never become as large as it ought to become unless it shed its reputation for being interested in "-isms"; the only kind of -ism the American people wanted from schoolteachers, he said, was "Americanism."

Boos and hisses greeted most of the AFL leader's comments, but he had the upper hand in his address to the money-starved union. "We have been asked repeatedly by your leaders to help and assist in launching organizing drives. We have helped to some extent, but it is the opinion of our executive council and the leaders of our movement that it will be only a waste of effort and a waste of money to try until you first make it clear to the nation that you are an American institution."⁴⁴ There would be no money without the

40. Dale Zysman to John Fewkes, 7 February 1939: "All this year we've been sawing wood, minding our own business and working in the interests of the teachers and the schools. . . . You'll note that the all of the disturbances which confront us from time to time come from the outside." CTU Collection.

41. "Report of the Secretary Treasurer," *AFT Proceedings*, 1940, AFT Collection, Series 13 14/2, pp. 136-82.

42. *AFT Proceedings*, 1940, AFT Collection, Series 13 14/1, pp. 27-35.

43. *Ibid.*

44. "Redbaiting Hit by Teachers at Convention," *Daily Worker*, 21 August 1940; "Redbaiting Marks Proceedings in AFL Teachers Convention," *Daily Worker*, 23 August 1940; Selma M. Borchardt to Harry Ferlinger, 9 September 1940, 19 September 1940, Borchardt Collection, 125/10;

revocation of Local 5's charter. Although some delegates responded with traditional AFT hostility, others were taken by Green's promises, the enthusiasm Counts demonstrated for the AFL, and the prospects of real power and real growth. These were the directions in which many in the AFT wanted to go; the days of gadfly existence were numbered.⁴⁵

The elections demonstrated that Counts's year of patient organizing had paid off. John DeBoer, a classroom teacher from Chicago, was chosen to challenge George Counts. Affable where Counts was formal and cold, DeBoer was well liked in his local but not well known nationally. His speech was aimed at peace, an issue that was so obviously taken from the recent Communist party line that even the unsophisticated were tipped off. Opponents circulated leaflets illustrating the parallels between the Communist party's *Daily Worker* and the *American Teacher* in an effort to unseat the current editor and to point out DeBoer's sympathies. Other teachers were assailed by petitions demanding to know, "Are you a member of the Communist Party? If not then you will not mind signing this petition of support for the election of George Counts."⁴⁶ Counts was reelected.

The Executive Council election was a rout: Charles Hendley of Local 5 was defeated by a little-known candidate from the much smaller New Rochelle local; the Seattle local finally elected their old star, Lila Hunter; Mary Grossman was not returned to office; and Mark Starr defeated the old WPA organizer Ned Dearborn. Even Doxey Wilkerson lost. Counts tried to put up Ralph Bunche from Howard University, fearing that Wilkerson simply had too much support from black delegates to be defeated. But Bunche had failed to pay his dues, and Counts settled for Layle Lane, who won this time. The second battle of Buffalo completely unseated the radicals from the AFT Executive Council.⁴⁷

The radicals at this point could surmise what was in store for Local 5. Charles Hendley, president of Local 5, announced in his summary of the meeting, "We may expect some sinister move against us from some source," and if this was not specific enough he said in private, "Green has an executive council that will now do his bidding." In the galleries above the delegates, members of the Rapp-Coudert Committee took notes on the existence of Communist teachers at the convention, while New York City Teachers' Guild members jubilantly greeted the election of Counts. In the end it was evident to everyone that the union was changing in a new direction. The old gadfly union was dead and a new, practical organization, strongly loyal to the AFL, rose from its ashes.⁴⁸

"Memorandum to Fill in the Gaps in the Discussion of the Meeting of the Executive Board of the Chicago Teachers' Union," 30 January 1940, Mary Herrick Collection, 1/3, Walter Reuther Archives, Detroit.

45. *AFT Proceedings*, 1940, AFT Collection, Series 13 14/1, pp. 416-18.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 485-99.

47. Investigation of Local 5, 31 December 1940-2 January 1941, AFT Collection, Series 3 24/3.

48. Ferlinger to Borchardt, 9 September 1940; Borchardt to Ferlinger, 19 September 1940;

In the fall of 1940 Counts appointed a committee of Mark Starr, Layle Lane, and himself to investigate ways of reforming Local 5 and getting it back into the AFL. But attempts to set up negotiations between the local and the Teachers' Guild met resistance on both sides. As tensions escalated, about two hundred members of Local 5 resigned in a bloc and set up a Committee for Free Teacher Unionism. They urged the AFT Executive Council to step in directly.⁴⁹ Matters moved to a head over the winter. The Executive Council announced a hearing on charges against Local 5, along with the New York College Teachers' Union Local 537 and Mary Grossman's Local 192 in Philadelphia. The official charges were that Local 5 was "not in harmony with the principles of the American Federation of Teachers and tended to bring the AFT into disrepute and because its existence is detrimental to the development of democracy in education."⁵⁰ The two-day hearing resembled a debate over the nature of teacher unionism. Issues ranged from the importance of working with industrial unions, not just AFL-affiliated unions, to the significance of working on community projects. Local 5 representatives said they were being attacked for their brash tactics or their scattered loyalties but not for results in terms of new members, new legislation, and administrative changes.

The discussion also shifted to a debate over what Counts and Linville described as "spurious advocates of socialized democracy" who disrupted professional activities of teacher unionists. Charles Hendley replied: "These discussions reveal some of the difficulties of operation of a real union in the academic world. The whole conception of a teachers' union still seems incongruous to 'professionally' minded teachers and educators. The traditional canons of behavior among professors do not permit the lusty give-and-take between mere teachers and the administrators of educational institutions which is involved in union activity."⁵¹

The attack on the "professionalism" of Linville and Counts continued the long debate over the Communists' tactics and activities, which pushed the union toward a more working-class language and identity. Linville and Counts were promoting a more consensual politics, one where teachers were in trade unions because of their professionalism, not in spite of it. The community-based organizing style of the communists was anathema to the professional ethics of the Counts school, and as the depression had kept potential teachers in college longer, the professionalization project had taken firmer root. The debate behind closed doors focused narrowly on old griev-

Borchardt Collection, 125/10. "Hearing of Local 5, The Teachers' Union of the City of New York, on Charges by the Executive Council and Order to Show Cause Why Its Charter Should Not Be Revoked," 15 and 16 February 1941, CTU Collection, 11/3.

49. "Hearing of Local 5," CTU Collection, 11/3.

50. CTU Collection, 11/4.

51. *American Teacher*, 26 (April 1941).

ances, but the line of struggle between the Communist teachers and the new unionists over what they considered the best direction for teacher unionism was firmly drawn.

After the two days of exhausting hearings, the proponents of the charged locals retired, and the Executive Council voted to recommend revocation of their charters in a national referendum. The referendum, which was scheduled for early April, would precede ratification at the convention by several months. Counts had no intention of allowing the three locals to return to the national convention, which he feared they might be able to pack.⁵²

The April 1941 issue of the *American Teacher* was devoted to the referendum on Locals 5, 537, and 192. Again the charges and countercharges were laid out clearly by both sides. On the issue of the Stalin-Hitler Pact, Local 5 president Hendley pointed out that other trade unions had followed a peace position all through the late thirties, and he argued that the sudden shift of the Soviet Union had prompted the local to look more closely at the issue. The vote in the referendum overwhelmingly favored revoking the charters of the locals.⁵³ The AFT convention, despite a challenge led by Doxey Wilkerson, upheld the membership's verdict with only a handful of delegates in opposition. The issue was settled. The teachers had ousted the locals and the decision was final.⁵⁴

There were two aspects of the 1941 convention that further illustrated the close of an era in the union. First, President Counts delivered a long speech on the threat of totalitarianism, the rise of Hitler, and the likely coming of war. Counts was dramatic, but he hoped to convey the sense that the teachers did have their house in order, as William Green had put it, and they could take a more patriotic stand in the struggles to come.

Perhaps because it looked to the past rather than the future, the second event was more nostalgic than it was dramatic. The AFT celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1941 and honored Florence Hanson, Charles Stillman, and Henry Linville. Linville spoke bitterly of the days when John Dewey was assailed by radicals in his own local, but Hanson spoke sentimentally of the old, small union. "The spirit in those days was strong; the devotion was illimitable. The organization pulsed with one great heart and soul. And what we must see to is that numbers do not cause any loss of that spirit. We worked hard to have full representation at a convention. . . . In the American Federation of Teachers there is room, I believe, for everyone."⁵⁵ Hanson's comments were met with applause, but it was approval of sentiment not substance. The union had taken a new direction and was firmly in the hands of new leadership.

52. *AFT Proceedings*, 1941, AFT Collection, Series 13 15/10, pp. 142-64.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-64.

54. Frances R. Donovan, *Schoolma'am* (New York, 1938), pp. 34-35, 74.

55. *AFT Proceedings*, 1941, AFT Collection, Series 13 15/10.

Gender Issues in the Depression

The Communist issue then was more than a question of absorbing a new generation of radicals. The peculiar circumstances that brought this new generation into the union, had to do with redefining professionalism within unionism. Professionalism, however, evoked male leadership and invariably excluded women. Although the NEA revolt of the professionals in the Progressive Era had lured women leaders into the new professionalism, by the twenties only men fit the proper image. There were no more Ella Flagg Youngs to lead women. A woman was elected president routinely every other year in the NEA, but no woman sat in the powerful seat of executive director. Charl Williams had been NEA president and worked on the NEA staff, but no women followed her. When the AFT chose a college man over a woman classroom teacher, as it did in 1938 with Davis over Hernstein and again in 1939 when it chose Counts to battle communism, the concept of union leadership shifted. Although Hernstein, Herrick, Borchardt, and Layle Lane would remain highly regarded leaders in the AFT, few women leaders continued the traditions begun by Haley, Barker, and Rood. In the decade of the depression, tensions between men's and women's locals became submerged in the ideological and fiscal problems confronting the union. The union oriented itself more toward the married male leader than toward the dynamic, single schoolteacher. In Chicago this shift was evident in the unification of the three locals—high school men, high school women, and elementary school teachers.

Although there were more women than men in the proposed merger and even though there were strong women leaders in two of the three locals, the head of the men's local, Jack Fewkes, was elected head of the new union. In part his election was a compromise because the women's locals were impoverished and would enter the new union in debt. But it also marked the eclipse of the Chicago women who, up until 1937, had played a leading role in the union. Later, after World War II, fewer women ran the union headquarters, as the new secretary-treasurer, Irving Kuenzli, took firm control of the office. Counts and the male leaders that followed felt no need to encourage the presence of more women in leadership positions. Still, on the local level, in committees and at the vice-presidential level, the older women leaders maintained their positions.

The absence of a new generation of women union leaders raises the point that during the depression and the New Deal the focus was always on the head of household, usually thought to be male, as the key figure for rehabilitation and relief. In part, this attitude arose from the Progressive Era emphasis on the family wage, professional motherhood, and the family economy. Such terms were part of the language of reformers like Frances Perkins, who carried these ideas into the Department of Labor. The biggest issue for women workers during the depression, as we shall see, was the

attempt by both public and private industry to lay off married women from the best white-collar positions and replace them with men (whether heads of households or not).

The fixation on sex-segregated job classification and the need to preserve the male position as family head persisted in the labor movement as well. The iconography of the labor movement in the thirties, as Elizabeth Faure has pointed out, suggests that the emphasis on male leadership and empowerment became an avenue for restoring male dignity lost in the depression. Joblessness desexed men. The teachers' union, however, always had a feminine image even though its leadership was becoming increasingly male. A cartoon appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* depicting John Fitzpatrick, head of the Chicago Federation of Labor, chasing Harold Gibbons of the AFT/WPA local out of the house as Gibbons carried a screaming baby CIO, John L. Lewis. Gibbons was drawn in drag because he headed the schoolteachers' (read female) union.

The AFT switch to male leaders, especially in the face of the Communist party, may also have been a way of getting back in touch with AFL men. As for the Communists, their clear alternative was the dynamic Bella Dodd, a woman of considerable skill and a member of a younger generation than Mary Herrick or Lillian Hernstein. Jerome Davis may have been unacceptable as a leader not because of his leftist tendencies but because of his apparently effeminate nature. Counts, on the other hand, liked to present a strong case, speak in a booming voice, and deal "firmly" with issues. This was all imagery, to be sure, but it was the kind of imagery that became important in the late thirties and early forties. By 1940, the critical year for the union, the pacifist movement, largely led by women, had become discredited, and Americans were defining the word "appeasement" to mean costly cowardice. All these elements added to the expectation that female leadership would not be strong enough to carry the union back into the fold of traditional labor. Men and women in the union agreed that what was needed was a strong hand. The strong hand, by their definition, would be male.

The emphasis on male leadership would with the coming of the war become further reinforced. The union did well during the war, and many felt it was because it had changed leadership so dramatically at its inception. Teachers, on the other hand, did poorly because wartime inflation destroyed wage levels. The general consensus from those who remained in the union, however, was that the crisis of the thirties was over.

The repercussions of the expulsion of "Communist" locals were not always as rewarding as some leaders might have hoped. The AFL did not suddenly begin listening more carefully to the AFT's legislative agenda, teachers did not sign up by the thousands, and conventions were still plagued with serious debates over issues of social justice. After World War II, however, as teacher militancy rose, there was no major debate over inappropriate tactics; teachers were even striking without much comment from

the national. The teacher-union movement had finally come to terms with professionalism. As the CIO faced an anticommunist drive in the late forties, the AFT stood as an experienced union in such affairs; perhaps for the first time the union could honestly say it had faced problems similar to those of private sector workers. Finally, the union had benefited from its strong support for minorities, and after the war it enjoyed a reputation for having taken early stands on issues that became difficult for other unions. In short, the union had matured, gained experience, and grown in size.

The biggest problem facing the union, however, was shaking its image as a red organization. Despite George Counts's sterling reputation among schoolteachers, his association with the union and his many visits to the Soviet Union branded him as a Communist. John Dewey's ideas on progressive education, his participation in a panel to look into the murder of Leon Trotsky, and his open association with the union again left him on the list of suspected fellow travelers. Even within the AFL neither Matt Woll nor William Green acted to bring the labor movement closer to the teachers. The campaign against the AFT in the late thirties that led to the ouster of Communists in 1941 was not forgotten by the public. Even after they had cleaned house and rid themselves of Local 5 and two other locals for good measure, members were still pinned with the image of the red schoolteacher. It was not an image that would serve them well in the postwar red scare.